# THE MISSING PIECE

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The Missing Piece

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# SYNOPSIS

Ever since the incident three years ago, art school graduate Shen Mo hasn't been able to paint with his right hand. He's currently working a desk job in a company owned by the Ji family, one of the wealthiest families in the city. Unbeknownst to his coworkers, however, he has a far more important role: the fake lover of the Ji family's young CEO,
Ji Mingxuan.

Ever the perfectionist, Ji Mingxuan makes Shen Mo put on the full act, both in public and in the bedroom. Their fake relationship stays this way until Ji Mingxuan's sister returns from abroad with her fiancé—Shen Mo's ex.

Once the four are reunited, the nightmares that Shen Mo has tried so desperately to escape catch up to him at last. As the lovers' pretense becomes more and more real, Shen Mo begins to learn about the things that Ji Mingxuan is keeping from him, as well as the truth of what really happened three years ago.

Only one question left:
**What will become of a love founded on pretense?**

# Chapter 1

"Zhou Yang is coming back tomorrow."

When Shen Mo heard these words, he was kneeling on the ground, sucking Ji Mingxuan off.

Holding the heat in his mouth, he felt his knees grow sore on the cold, hard marble of the ground. It was an uncomfortable fusion of ice and fire. Like a blunt, rusting knife, the name "Zhou Yang" stabbed into his heart, sending blood flying everywhere. He almost felt as if his soul had been pulled out of his body.

Then, a sharp pain drove Shen Mo back to reality.

Ji Mingxuan grabbed his hair and forced him to raise his head. "What? Just hearing your old lover's name makes you lose your composure?"

Shen Mo still had Ji Mingxuan's cock in his mouth. He could only shake his head, making it up to Ji Mingxuan by licking it with his tongue.

Ji Mingxuan sighed and relaxed, his erection growing larger in Shen Mo's mouth. He took an unconcerned glance at Shen Mo's body, as if he knew everything but cared too little to point it out. Looking down upon him, he said, "Go deeper."

Quickly, Shen Mo turned back to sucking and swallowing.

He'd always been bad at this, making no progress no matter how much porn he watched. Tonight, he was so distracted that Ji Mingxuan also got bored, releasing only once in his mouth.

When Shen Mo went to the bathroom to rinse his mouth, he found that his own reflection looked unfamiliar. His hair had grown much longer, his eyes almost covered by his bangs, while his lips were a little swollen. He still had some come at the corners of his mouth.

He turned on the tap and heard the water splash.

*Zhou Yang...*

It almost seemed as if the story of Zhou Yang and him was a whole lifetime ago.

Shen Mo was gargling when he heard the outside door being shut. He went out of the bathroom and found that Ji Mingxuan had already left. There was no doubt that Ji Mingxuan hadn't enjoyed himself too much. He must've gone out for more fun.

Shen Mo scolded himself for being so absent-minded while sleeping with Mr. Ji. Luckily, Ji Mingxuan had always had good-looking bedmates who were both gentle and skilled. Shen Mo felt a brief surge of guilt before he gladly let go of the issue and went to bed.

He usually slept well and seldom dreamed. That night, however, he had a dream.

He dreamed that he was in his university dormitory. The room was cramped, with books and problem sets scattered over the bunk bed. It was almost dusk—half of the room was coated in twilight, while the rest was enveloped in darkness.

Having pinned Shen Mo against a corner of the room, Zhou Yang lowered his head to reach Shen Mo's lips.

Scattered footsteps passed outside the room.

They were so young and nervous that they both sweat. Shen Mo opened his eyes slightly and caught sight of the stubble on Zhou Yang's chin.

Then he woke up.

He didn't know whether he was still dreaming.

He'd slept so heavily that his face felt numb. It didn't recover until he spent a while rubbing it with his hands. He then cleaned himself up and went downstairs for breakfast, but only to find that Ji Mingxuan was already well-dressed, reading the

newspaper at his seat.

Shen Mo looked up at the clock and asked, “Aren’t you going to work today, Mr. Ji?”

Ji Mingxuan glanced at him before turning his gaze back to the newspaper. “I’m going to the airport to pick someone up.”

Shen Mo was momentarily surprised.

Pick up who? Zhou Yang?

Ji Mingxuan knew he had misunderstood and couldn’t help laughing. “An’an is also coming back today.”

Now he was wide awake.

Ji An’an was Ji Mingxuan’s dearest little sister, as well as Zhou Yang’s childhood sweetheart. Their respective families, the Zhou and the Ji, had long since been trying to make the two a match, even sending them to study abroad together three years ago.

Now that Zhou Yang was back, Ji An’an would no doubt be with him.

Shen Mo got himself a glass of water and heard Ji Mingxuan say, “You’re coming with me.”

Shen Mo almost knocked over his glass. “Mr. Ji...”

Yet Ji Mingxuan still didn’t look up, slowly turning the silver ring on his left ring finger. “Any concerns?”

Shen Mo had the same ring on his finger. He looked at his hand and finally answered, “No.”

Ji Mingxuan was satisfied, nodding. “Have something.”

Shen Mo ate without much enjoyment.

At nine, they left for the airport. To make amends for his neglect last night, Shen Mo took Ji Mingxuan’s coat and helped him put it on. Ji Mingxuan only looked better in the day than he did at night. After taking a few steps forward, he suddenly turned around and waved at Shen Mo.

“Mr. Ji...” At first, Shen Mo didn’t know what he meant.

A faint smile appeared at the corners of Ji Mingxuan’s mouth. His voice was beyond gentle: “Shen Mo, did you call the wrong name?”

Shen Mo finally remembered what he was supposed to do. He approached Ji Mingxuan and held his hand. “Mingxuan.”

“Yes.” Ji Mingxuan leaned affectionately toward him, whispering, “Don’t forget our relationship.”

“Lovers,” Shen Mo smoothly answered.

*Fake lovers,* he added in silence.

Acting had never been something Shen Mo was good at. If he were one of those celebrities whom Ji Mingxuan provided for, he’d probably cooperate with Ji Mingxuan better.

But he was Shen Mo.

Shen Mo felt quite sorry about how Ji Mingxuan had to condescend to be together with him.

They arrived at the airport early. Ji Mingxuan made three phone calls and sent two emails during their wait before the plane finally landed.

Shen Mo had once dreamed of leaving this place along with Zhou Yang. He later realized that freedom always came with a price. Now, he stood here with his hand held by Ji Mingxuan, watching Zhou Yang and Ji An’an walk toward them. The two

seemed to be made for each other.

Ji An'an was two years younger than Ji Mingxuan, which put her right at the prime of her youth. Wearing a pink cloak and a small beret, she flew into Ji Mingxuan's arms like a little bird.

"Brother!"

He patted her on her back and asked, "How was studying abroad?"

"Everything was great except not having you there."

Ji Mingxuan chuckled when he heard her. "Each year I fly almost a half dozen times to see you."

"How could a half dozen times in three hundred and sixty-five days each year be enough?" answered Ji An'an.

Ji Mingxuan laughed.

Shen Mo stood at the side and watched them talk. Suddenly, someone tall blocked the sunlight in front of him.

Shen Mo turned around. What he saw first was Zhou Yang's chin.

He still remembered how it had made him feel when they kissed. The stubble that Zhou Yang had at the time always seemed to tickle his heart. After all these years, Zhou Yang was a little taller than Shen Mo remembered, although he looked as mature and reliable as before with those rimless glasses on his face.

Their eyes met, although it wasn't as dramatic as what TV shows usually depicted. Words got stuck in Shen Mo's throat. While he hesitated to say "long time no see," he already heard Ji Mingxuan introducing him, "This is Shen Mo."

Then Ji Mingxuan pointed at Zhou Yang and said, "Zhou Yang, my sister's boyfriend."

The word "boyfriend" was sort of a warning.

Shen Mo had to extend his hand. "Hello, Mr. Zhou."

Zhou Yang didn't shake hands with him. "What a coincidence." He looked at Shen Mo. "We were classmates in high school, Mr. Shen. Don't you remember?"

If this happened several years ago, Shen Mo would've felt incredibly embarrassed. But in his years of being with Ji Mingxuan, the only progress he had made was growing a thicker skin. "I'm sorry. My memory's not so great," he smiled and said.

They stood there greeting one another for so long that Ji An'an began to complain about feeling hungry.

Ji Mingxuan immediately turned back toward her and asked, "What do you want for lunch?"

"Seafood."

Ji Mingxuan had always been a good brother, giving her whatever she wanted. But this time, he refused, "Not today. We can have seafood on our own next time."

"Why not?"

Ji Mingxuan put a hand on Shen Mo's shoulder. His strength was neither too heavy nor too light, suggesting a vague intimacy between the two. He answered, "He's allergic to seafood."

Zhou Yang's gaze changed. He didn't say anything.

Although Ji An'an had a bit of a spoiled princess's character, she wasn't too picky or hard to please. She waved her hand. "Then let's eat something else."

As she spoke, she studied Shen Mo quietly.

Ji Mingxuan didn't show anything on the surface. He held Shen Mo's hand the

entire way.

In the end, they had lunch at a European restaurant that Ji Mingxuan usually went to. It wasn't big, but the atmosphere was good. Ji Mingxuan ordered a bottle of wine and flaunted the ring on his left hand when he picked up his wine glass. One would expect no less from someone who hung out with actors so often—his performance was utterly natural, not at all pretentious.

Shen Mo was so utterly impressed that he could even applaud him.

During their lunch, Ji An'an talked the most, babbling all the way from the English weather to her Korean classmate. Zhou Yang was quiet as usual. Ji Mingxuan was the busiest, paying attention to what Ji An'an was talking about while taking care of Shen Mo as well. Shen Mo wasn't used to having European cuisine, so Ji Mingxuan cut his steak for him, adding, "Next time we'll have your favorite—Peking duck."

Seeing this, even Ji An'an had mixed feelings. "Brother, if you keep on giving off so much PDA, I'm gonna get jealous."

Ji Mingxuan didn't reply. He only smiled at Shen Mo with a wink.

Shen Mo felt beyond flattered.

Luckily, he still had some self-awareness.

Everyone knew that Mr. Ji had a bad temper and showed patience only to his family. It was all thanks to Ji An'an that he'd attained the honor to be treated so tenderly.

"You like Peking duck, Mr. Shen?" asked Zhou Yang, who had been silent all along.

Shen Mo answered, "That's right. I tend to prefer Chinese food."

Zhou Yang looked at him deeply. "We were in the same class for three years, and I never knew you were allergic to seafood."

"My allergic reaction isn't too serious. Maybe you overlooked, Mr. Zhou."

With an unassuming personality, Ji An'an didn't see the storm that passed between them. She joined their conversation: "You two were classmates, weren't you? Why are you so polite to each other?"

The corners of Zhou Yang's mouth twitched. " I'm not too familiar with Mr. Shen."

He then lowered his head and went back to his meal.

In the past, he'd always spoken little while Shen Mo talked a lot. Even about a small thing, Shen Mo could prattle on for ages. One time, they had an argument with each other, and Zhou Yang yelled at him, "Shen Mo, Shen Mo—why can't you be as quiet as your name suggests*?"

*Translator's Note: the word *chenmo (□□)*, similar to Shen Mo's name, means "silence" in Chinese.

After getting together with Ji Mingxuan, Shen Mo had indeed become quieter.

It was because he knew that nobody would listen, no matter how much he spoke.

Shen Mo was a little absent-minded. Suddenly, he heard Ji Mingxuan ask, "When are you getting married?"

Ji An'an's face turned red immediately. "Brother..."

"Or do you want to date him for your entire life? Even if I'm alright with it, the elders of the Zhou family would never let it happen."

"We just got back, and we have so many things to do. I've talked about this with Zhou Yang already. We'll think about the other things after his career is settled."

# Chapter 2

When Shen Mo got up and went to the mirror the next morning, he wasn't surprised to find a wound at the corner of his mouth. Ji Mingxuan's bite mark was clearly visible, impossible to hide.

If he went to the office with it, there would be gossip flying everywhere. But… that might've been exactly what Mr. Ji wanted.

Shen Mo signed, cleaned himself up, and went downstairs with the wound at his mouth.

Even from afar, he could hear Ji An'an's laughter. The Ji siblings were chatting happily. As Shen Mo went over to greet them, Ji An'an looked at him. "Shen-ge..."

Leaving her words unfinished, she couldn't move her eyes from his lips.

"Wait. Shen-ge, what happened to your mouth?"

Shen Mo sat down and replied, "It's nothing. I accidentally injured myself yesterday."

"How could an injury look like that? It looks as if..."

"An'an," Ji Mingxuan knocked on the table and said, "finish your meal."

Ji An'an looked at Ji Mingxuan first and then Shen Mo. Suddenly, she came to an understanding, showing an expression of realization on her face. She laughed a little and said, "Well, well. I'll finish my breakfast and leave you two alone."

Ji Mingxuan ignored Shen Mo, and Shen Mo didn't have much to say either. They both just enjoyed their food. It was Ji An'an who broke the ice at last, saying that she was going to attend a job interview today.

Ji Mingxuan suggested, "Why go out and find a job by yourself? Isn't it better to come to my company and help me?"

"I'm not Shen-ge. I don't want to see you every day. "

As they were chatting, Ji An'an's phone rang. She turned to the side and answered the phone. The tone with which she spoke sounded sweet. "Yeah, I had breakfast already. Yeah, I'm coming."

Ji Mingxuan said, "Looks like the one you do want to see every day is here to pick you up."

Ji An'an didn't deny it. She only said, "Enjoy the breakfast," and left in a hurry.

Shen Mo seemed to hear the sound of the car moving. He remembered how he had also been so eager to meet Zhou Yang when they were dating. When his attention returned, he found Ji Mingxuan staring at him with half a smile on his face.

"Mr. Ji..." Shen Mo felt a little guilty.

"Yes." Ji Mingxuan grabbed Shen Mo's chin and carefully looked at his face before asking, "Does the cut on your lip still hurt?"

Shen Mo immediately replied, "Not really."

Ji Mingxuan then smiled, lowering his head to kiss Shen Mo on the lips. He licked the wound purposely.

Feeling a prick of pain, Shen Mo complained, "Mr. Ji..."

Ji Mingxuan didn't let go of Shen Mo until he felt he had kissed enough. Righteously, he said, "To sterilize it."

Shen Mo was a little stunned. He could only say, "Thank you."

With a smile as warm as the spring breeze, Ji Mingxuan stood up and said, "It's time for work. I'll drive you there."

Shen Mo had been with Ji Mingxuan for three years, yet he still didn't understand

Ji Mingxuan's temper well. Ji Mingxuan could be laughing one second and heartless the next. In short, he was mysterious and temperamental. Obedience was the best response.

So Shen Mo took Ji Mingxuan's car to the office.

The wound on his mouth caught the attention of many, but his colleagues knew what not to say—at least they didn't gossip in front of him.

A few days later, Shen Mo's wound disappeared. Ji An'an got a new job as well. It was the weekend that day, and Ji Mingxuan was busy as usual. Ji An'an knocked on Shen Mo's bedroom door and asked, "Shen-ge, are you free this afternoon?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Zhou Yang's birthday is coming up in a few days. I want to buy him a present. Can you come shopping with me?"

Shen Mo then remembered that Zhou Yang's birthday was in the winter. He tried not to think of the memories. He had indeed forgotten many. He was still thinking about how to politely turn her down when Ji An'an continued her attempt at persuasion. "Every year I have trouble deciding on a present. You were classmates with Zhou Yang, so you should be able to give me some ideas."

Shen Mo forced a smile. "I'm not too familiar with Zhou Yang."

"It's okay. You can carry my things for me."

Shen Mo didn't know how to reject other people. And with Ji An'an's persistent nagging, he finally agreed to go out with her.

Ji An'an went directly to the department store. Shen Mo did her the favor of carrying the things she brought. For the first time, he realized how troublesome shopping with a woman could be. They spent hours just at the men's department—Shen Mo tried on so many clothes that even his hands grew sore. Later, Ji An'an found a pair of cufflinks, but she hesitated between two styles. Shen Mo suggested that she buy them both.

Ji An'an thought for a while and agreed, "Sounds great. We can give the other one to my brother."

She was satisfied with the presents she had bought. Noticing that it was late already, she suggested having dinner at a restaurant nearby, "Brother recommended it to me. I heard the signature dishes there are quite good."

Shen Mo was extremely tired. All he wanted was to sit down and rest for a bit, so he naturally accepted her suggestion.

The restaurant wasn't far from here, so they went there on foot. But when they arrived, they were told that they had to make a reservation. Ji An'an could only bring up Ji Mingxuan's name. Coincidentally, several new customers came in. Looking up, Shen Mo saw Ji Mingxuan.

Ji An'an was very surprised. "Brother, you're also having dinner here?"

Ji Mingxuan was also surprised for an instant. He asked, "Why are you here?"

Ji An'an grabbed Shen Mo's arm. "You're always so busy with work. I had to ask Shen-ge to come with me."

She added, "We didn't make a reservation."

Ji Mingxuan stroked her hair and smiled. "Don't worry. I won't let you leave hungry."

Then he turned back and asked the person next to him, "You don't mind eating together, do you?"

The man next to him was an attractive actor called Zhao Yi. He seemed to be

quite popular these days, frequently appearing in various events. Having watched several of the TV shows he starred in, Shen Mo thought he looked even more charming than he did on TV.

Zhao Yi smiled with impeccable elegance. “Of course not.”

Ji Mingxuan had already made a reservation. The private room he’d booked was large enough for four people to sit inside.

After taking a seat, Zhao Yi looked at Ji An’an and Shen Mo. “Mr. Ji, aren’t you going to introduce us to one another?”

Ji Mingxuan pointed at Ji An’an. “My sister.”

Yet he didn’t introduce Shen Mo.

“Oh, so it’s Miss Ji.” Zhao Yi still didn’t know who Shen Mo was, so he guessed his own. “Is this Miss Ji’s boyfriend?”

Ji An’an chuckled when she heard him.

“Wrong.” Ji Mingxuan turned to the menu and slowly answered, “He’s the future, Mrs. Ji.”

Zhao Yi’s smile froze on his face.

Even Ji An’an almost choked on her tea.

However, Zhao Yi had been in the entertainment industry for years. He got over it in no time. “Mr. Ji, you have a great sense of humor.”

Ji Mingxuan didn’t deny it, instead of tossing the menu on the table. “Order something.”

It was the first time that Ji An’an and Shen Mo had been to this restaurant. Zhao Yi ordered several dishes before asking about their preferences, “Their signature dish is a must-have... Miss Ji, how is your spice tolerance?”

He was smooth and agreeable.

Shen Mo found himself quite far behind Zhao Yi in this regard. He chose to drink his tea at the side.

Ji Mingxuan’s joke had startled the others just now, but he was the calmest person among them. Three years ago, after Shen Mo had recovered and left the hospital, he once signed a contract with Ji Mingxuan. Everything was perfunctory, of course. Even the rings on their fingers were bought by Ji Mingxuan’s secretary on short notice.

At the time, Shen Mo was in a sort of trance. Everything seemed like a dream; nothing felt real to him. He even felt it was a good thing that Zhou Yang wasn’t a fickle playboy. Otherwise, just how many times would Ji Mingxuan have to marry, all for the sake of his sister?

This restaurant brought the dishes quickly and the food tasted delicious, especially the signature dish—the suckling pig, roasted golden. It looked scorched on the surface but was tender inside, crisp and not greasy. Once Ji An’an had a taste, she couldn’t help but praise the dish. Upon hearing that Zhao Yi was an actor, she grew curious and couldn’t help but ask him about the entertainment industry’s gossip.

Zhao Yi was also talkative—even when it came to boring trivialities, he could describe them vividly and in exciting ways, making Ji An’an laugh.

Ji Mingxuan could only ask her during a break in their conversation, “An’an, how did shopping go today?”

Ji An’an said, “ Thanks to Shen-ge’s help, I’ve already gotten Zhou Yang a present.”

# Chapter 3

Lao Zhang was a good driver; they reached the pharmacy soon. Shen Mo got out of the car and bought the medicine. When he got back inside, he felt a pain in his stomach. Only then did he realize that while he was focused on taking care of Ji Mingxuan, he had forgotten to have lunch.

The sky was already dark when Shen Mo returned. He got himself something to eat and made some more congee for Ji Mingxuan. He then asked Ji Mingxuan to eat the congee along with the medicine he just bought.

They didn't call the doctor. Worried, Shen Mo stayed by the bed and took Ji Mingxuan's temperature every half-hour.

Luckily, Ji Mingxuan's temperature went down.

Past midnight, Shen Mo was too tired to stay awake and fell asleep beside the bed.

He began to dream as he slept. In the dream, the snow had fallen. All he saw was a vast whiteness. Everyone was walking fast on the streets, their heads hanging low. The snow hadn't melted yet. It even froze in some places, making it difficult for people to walk on.

But someone held his hand the entire way.

Shen Mo didn't find the walk difficult. He felt happy instead, talking to the person as he walked.

"Today, my coworkers excluded me at work again.

"To be honest, I still prefer painting."

These were all honest words he usually never told anyone. However, it was strange that the person next to him didn't say anything.

Shen Mo turned around and asked, "Zhou Yang, why aren't you saying anything?"

The man stopped and said, "I'm not Zhou Yang."

Shen Mo looked up only to find that the man, tall and handsome, was actually Ji Mingxuan.

"Mr. Ji..."

Ji Mingxuan laughed coldly and slapped his hand off. Shen Mo fell on the icy snow on the ground as if he had suddenly lost his ability to walk.

He was instantly woken up, only to hear Ji Mingxuan's voice. "How could you fall on the ground while sleeping?"

Speaking, Ji Mingxuan turned on the wall lamp.

Confused, Shen Mo looked at Ji Mingxuan for a while, as if he was still in his dream. Then he realized that he had fallen from the bed. He slowly got up from the floor, his expression still a little confused.

Ji Mingxuan lifted the blanket. "Come here."

Shen Mo got into the blanket and brought in the cold air with him. It was warm in Ji Mingxuan's arms. The heat felt a little uncomfortable to Shen Mo, so he shifted to the side.

But right away, Ji Mingxuan pulled him back.

With one arm wrapped around him, Ji Mingxuan said, "Don't move. Do you want to fall again?"

Shen Mo didn't dare to move. After the fall, he was finding it hard to go back to sleep. "Mr. Ji, did I wake you up?"

"I slept for a whole day. I've had enough sleep."

# Chapter 4

Shen Mo didn't know how he had walked toward Ji Mingxuan. When his attention returned, Ji Mingxuan was already holding his hand tightly.

A while later, Zhou Yang hurried over. When he saw Ji Mingxuan holding hands with Shen Mo, he looked surprised for a moment, but he quickly concealed it, asking, "What happened?"

"It's nothing," Ji Mingxuan unrolled the sleeves of his shirt and replied. "I drank too much and accidentally knocked someone over."

Seeing the current situation, Zhou Yang knew that what Ji Mingxuan had said was not true. Although the people around them were whispering, no one refuted Ji Mingxuan.

And so, Zhou Yang said, "I see."

Ji Mingxuan patted Zhou Yang's shoulder and spoke naturally, "Help me handle it, Brother-in-law."

"Of course," Zhou Yang swallowed before he said, "Brother."

After the reply, Zhou Yang turned his gaze to Shen Mo. But before Shen Mo could meet his eyes, Ji Mingxuan had already pulled Shen Mo away.

Shen Mo followed Ji Mingxuan without thinking. He caught a glimpse of Zhao Yi standing amid the crowd, but Ji Mingxuan went straight out of the hotel's hall, not even giving Zhao Yi a single glance.

There was a small garden outside the hall. The hotel had spent a great deal of money crafting the beautiful scenery. A variety of unknown plants surrounded the garden, and in the middle of the garden flowed a small stream. It was the fifteenth day of the lunisolar calendar that night. The moon looked particularly big and round, and the moonlight quietly shone down on the ground, creating a quiet, pleasant atmosphere.

Ji Mingxuan slowed down and said, "I wanted to get some fresh air and sober up a little."

Shen Mo had seen Ji Mingxuan drunk. He knew that Ji Mingxuan was more than sober now, but he didn't point it out. He looked at Ji Mingxuan's hand and said, "You got hurt, Mr. Ji."

Only now did Ji Mingxuan remember. He said with nonchalance, "It's just a scratch."

Shen Mo grabbed Ji Mingxuan's hand and examined it in the moonlight. The injury was just a scratch indeed, but it also meant that Ji Mingxuan had really exerted himself during that fight.

Shen Mo's heart beat faster than usual. He felt as if he was still in a dream.

Perhaps, even while dreaming, Shen Mo would never expect Mr. Ji to have fought with someone in public.

Gripping Ji Mingxuan's hand, Shen Mo asked, "Do you want to go to the hospital?"

Then Shen Mo said to himself, "So many people saw you hit that guy. How will they write about it in the newspapers tomorrow?"

Ji Mingxuan laughed. "What do you think? They'll probably write about the marriage between the Ji and Zhou families and what a good match the couple is. Nothing else will be mentioned."

With Ji Mingxuan's ability, it'd be more than easy to cover up this incident. But people like him usually held their social statuses in high regard; they'd never lose

their grace in public like he had.

And that was why so many people were shocked by Ji Mingxuan's behavior today.

"Mr. Ji."

"Yes?"

"Why did you… hit him?"

Shen Mo thought he might know the answer, but he wasn't sure. He wanted to hear it from Ji Mingxuan directly.

Yet, Ji Mingxuan didn't answer the question. Instead, he clasped Shen Mo's hand and said, "Take a walk with me."

The garden wasn't big; they reached its end after just a while. As if he wasn't satisfied, Ji Mingxuan held Shen Mo's hand and walked around the garden over and over again.

Seeing how Ji Mingxuan wasn't saying anything, Shen Mo's mind began to wander. He didn't know what he was thinking about when he suddenly heard Ji Mingxuan call his name, "Shen Mo."

Shen Mo absently turned around, only to find that Ji Mingxuan had already stopped and was now looking down at him.

Ji Mingxuan's features looked quite beautiful in the hazy moonlight.

Ji Mingxuan gazed at Shen Mo quietly, as if he had been looking at Shen Mo for a long time. His eyes were as tender as water, gently sweeping over Shen Mo's face.

Shen Mo's heartbeat quickened again. He could only say, "Mr. Ji..."

All was silent in the moonlight.

Ji Mingxuan said nothing. He lowered his head and then tenderly kissed Shen Mo's lips.

Shen Mo didn't sleep well that night. He woke up drowsily the next morning. He obviously hadn't drunk any wine, but he felt like he was drunk. Many of his memories became hazy—like that of Zhou Yang and Ji An'an's impressive engagement banquet or the scar-faced man who had scared him so much that he'd started shaking. The only thing that he could clearly remember was how Ji Mingxuan had rolled up his sleeves before the fight, and… the kiss underneath the moonlight.

Shen Mo touched his lips. Even after the whole night, he still felt a slight tingle there.

He had woken up late this morning. When he got downstairs, the Ji siblings were already in the dining room. Ji An'an was asking Ji Mingxuan what had happened last night.

"I heard Zhou Yang's cousin used to be involved with gangs. Brother, how could you fight him? Weren't you worried that he'd knock over you with just one punch? What if something happened to you?"

Due to her nagging, Ji Mingxuan could only answer, "I knew that. I wasn't worried. That could never happen."

Ji An'an's curiosity wasn't satisfied yet. Cupping her chin in her hands, she added, "They said you were drunk. But as far as I know, your tolerance shouldn't be that bad."

Ji Mingxuan replied casually, "They can say whatever they want."

Obviously, Ji An'an wasn't content with such an answer. When she saw Shen Mo

come over, she asked, “Shen-ge, you were with my brother yesterday. Do you think he was actually drunk?”

Although Shen Mo knew the truth, he couldn’t explain it to Ji An’an. Fortunately, Ji Mingxuan helped him out and changed the subject. “An’an, do you have today off?”

“Yeah, it’s the weekend today.”

“There’s an auto show in the afternoon. Pick a car there. Think of it as my engagement present for you.”

“There are so many cars in the garage already. We can drive any one of them. Why buy a new one?”

“It’s different.” Ji Mingxuan smiled as he turned to Shen Mo. “I’m busy today. You can go with An’an, and also see if there’s any that you like. You have a driving license, don’t you? There’s no need to walk to work every day.”

Shen Mo didn’t expect that he’d also be asked to go. He was about to turn down the offer, but Ji An’an spoke before him, “Alright, alright. If I go with Shen-ge, I’ll definitely find a car I like. Don’t worry, Brother.”

As she spoke, she winked at Ji Mingxuan.

Ji Mingxuan let out a laugh and didn’t say anything else. After breakfast, he went to work.

Ji An’an returned to her bedroom, got changed, and put on makeup. Then she begged Shen Mo to go with her. Shen Mo had no choice but to accompany her to the auto show.

They had lunch outside. Ji An’an was talking about cars the entire way, asking Shen Mo for his favorite brand, type, and output volume of a car. Shen Mo never paid too much attention to cars, so he didn’t really know what he liked. He could only reply, “Pick whatever you like. I just came to take a look. I don’t actually have to buy a car.”

Ji An’an gave him one glance and couldn’t help laughing. “Did you think Brother really wanted to give me an engagement present? He wanted to buy you a car, but he was too embarrassed to mention it, so he used me as an excuse. Believe it or not, if you don’t buy a car today, he’ll give you one tomorrow—an extremely expensive one, too.”

Before, Shen Mo would never have believed this. But after what had happened last night, he wasn’t so sure anymore. He had a straightforward character, unlike Ji Mingxuan, who would go in such a roundabout way just to buy him a car, so he’d always found it hard to fathom Mr. Ji’s thoughts.

Ji Mingxuan was the only thing on Shen Mo’s mind. At the auto show, however, he just so happened to run into Zhou Yang.

Ji An’an was also surprised. She whispered, “I just sent him a message. I didn’t ask him to come.”

But after all, Ji An’an was in love with Zhou Yang. She was naturally glad to see him, asking with a grin, “Why are you here?”

“My fiancée wants to buy a car. Of course I have to come and see.”

“Didn’t you say you had some family business to deal with? That cousin of yours...”

“I’ve dealt with it already.” Zhou Yang’s face looked unpleasant for a moment. Whether intentionally or not, his eyes swept over Shen Mo’s face as he added, “He offended someone he shouldn’t have offended. Looks like it’ll be tough on him.”

# Chapter 5

The smile that she usually wore on her face had long since disappeared, replaced by an expression so empty that it almost looked numb. She stared straight at Zhou Yang.

Zhou Yang didn't dare look into her eyes. He cried out, "An'an…."

Shen Mo pushed Zhou Yang aside and said, "An'an, you misunderstood. I actually… received a text message…."

Shen Mo's thoughts were in a mess. He felt like he was the main character of a shoddy romantic drama, who could only use the most unconvincing words to speak for himself.

Obviously, Ji An'an didn't believe him.

"You don't have to say anything." She took off something that looked like an earbud from beside her ear. "I heard everything."

Shen Mo processed this for a moment before realizing that someone had probably installed a voice recording device in the room. There might even be a pinhole camera.

And all this must have been Zhou Chu's doing.

Zhou Chu had racked his brains trying to get Zhou Yang and Shen Mo to meet each other so that he could reveal the truth to Ji An'an. He was an illegitimate son who had just been accepted into the Zhou family, so he was probably having quite a tough time. But if he could destroy the marriage between the Zhou and Ji families, Zhou Yang would lose the support of the Ji family, and the situation would be vastly different.

Sure enough, Shen Mo heard Ji An'an say, "I didn't believe what your brother said at first, but who would've known… Zhou Yang, was everything you just said true?"

Ji An'an took a step forward, standing face to face with Zhou Yang, and asked, "You've been lying to me all this time?"

For a long time, Zhou Yang didn't answer.

Only when Ji An'an asked again did Zhou Yang let out a long sigh. He took off his glasses and massaged the center of his brows. He'd always cared about his image; even now, he was no different. He put the glasses back on his face and then looked right into Ji An'an's eyes, parting his lips to utter, "That's right."

Ji An'an's body shuddered. Blood drained from her face in an instant.

Zhou Yang saw how she looked, but he continued nonetheless, "I, Zhou Yang, have never loved Ji An'an."

Right as he finished, he received a punch in the face.

It was Shen Mo who had punched him. Shen Mo shook his right hand, realizing for the first time how good it felt to hit someone. Perhaps he should have hit Zhou Yang a long time ago.

Ignoring Zhou Yang's pained groan, Shen Mo turned to Ji An'an and took her hand. "An'an, it's really complicated. Let's talk somewhere else."

Ji An'an shook her head. She was still staring at Zhou Yang, one of whose eyes were swollen. She asked, "Why did you lie to me?"

Zhou Yang chuckled as he covered his right eye. "You should ask your dear brother instead. If he didn't try everything he could to set us up, how could I have ever gotten together with you? How could I have ever… broken up with Shen Mo?"

Ji An'an trembled. It wasn't until then that she finally looked at Shen Mo, asking,

“Shen-ge, are you and my brother… also just an act?”

Shen Mo didn’t know how to answer the question. “Mr. Ji is already on his way. He can explain everything to you when he gets here.”

Ji An’an refused to let go of him, asking stubbornly, “You were together with Zhou Yang in the beginning, weren’t you?”

Under such circumstances, Shen Mo could no longer lie to her. He stayed silent for a long while before he said, “It’s all in the past.”

As Ji An’an blinked, a tear dropped from her right eye, rolling down her cheek. Then she forced her lips into a pale smile. She whispered, “I understand.”

Shen Mo hurried to say, “An’an...”

Ji An’an shook off his hand and looked straight ahead with dark, vacuous eyes. She murmured, “So it was all a lie….”

As she spoke, she turned around and stumbled out of the room.

Seeing how she looked, Shen Mo was about to go after her when Zhou Yang caught his wrist.

Shen Mo looked back at Zhou Yang, enraged. “Why did you talk to An’an like that?”

Zhou Yang’s glasses were skewed from the punch. He looked quite miserable, smiling bitterly. “With what happened, could I have kept on lying to her? She’d know the truth sooner or later. Finding out is better than being lied to for the rest of her life.”

Shen Mo was so angered that he just wanted to punch Zhou Yang again. But he was worried about Ji An’an, so he didn’t waste time here. He struggled out of Zhou Yang’s grip and went out of the room.

Yet, he was in such a hurry that he ran into the man who’d just rushed in.

Shen Mo looked up. The man in front of him was no other than Ji Mingxuan. Although Shen Mo had known Ji Mingxuan would come over, a mixture of feelings arose when he saw his face. For a moment, Shen Mo couldn’t say anything.

Ji Mingxuan was a little out of breath, perhaps from running up to the sixth floor. He first looked at Shen Mo before turning to Zhou Yang, who was still in the room. He was somewhat surprised, but he didn’t show any emotion on his face, only asking, “Where’s An’an?”

Shen Mo didn’t dare to conceal anything. He spoke directly, “Miss Ji found out about everything.”

“About what?”

“What happened between Zhou Yang and me.”

Ji Mingxuan’s face paled. He asked at once, “Where is she?”

“She just ran out.”

Ji Mingxuan turned around to run after her.

Shen Mo couldn’t help asking, “Mr. Ji, were you… the one who told the Zhou family about my relationship with Zhou Yang?”

Ji Mingxuan stopped for a moment, but he didn’t answer the question. He only rushed out of the room.

Shen Mo wanted to follow him, but suddenly he felt as if he no longer had the strength to take even a single step.

Was he afraid of finding out the answer?

Now that all this had happened, what would his relationship with Ji Mingxuan become?

# Chapter 6

Shen Mo felt an excruciating pain in his fingers.

Unable to bear the pain, he awoke from his coma, opening his eyes in a panic. What he saw were miserable shades of white—white walls, white sheets, white gauze... He was confused for a while before he realized that he was in a hospital. Recalling what had happened before he'd fallen unconscious, he curled up his body out of instinct.

He had been kidnapped on his way home. The abandoned warehouse reeked of mold. The endless beatings and torture made the passing of time feel especially slow. With his head pressed against the ground, Shen Mo watched the sky darken little by little through the cobwebbed window. And then, a glimmer of light seeped through the boundless dark.

Although he was unconscious, he still kept calling Zhou Yang's name over and over again.

But the man had never come to save him.

"Zhou Yang..."

Shen Mo trembled underneath the blanket, unconsciously calling the same name again. Wrapped in a thick gauze, his right hand hurt so much that he almost couldn't feel it. He remembered how the scar-faced man had stepped on his fingers one by one, sneering while telling him that Zhou Yang would never show up.

Zhou Yang was abroad with his childhood sweetheart. No matter how many phone calls Shen Mo made, no one answered.

The sound of his fingers being crushed still echoed in Shen Mo's ears. He closed his eyes. That sound then changed to the creak of a door.

The door to the hospital room opened. A tall man came in.

Shen Mo thought it was Zhou Yang. But when he looked up, he saw an unfamiliar face. An emptiness filled his heart. He didn't know what he felt, but suddenly he was no longer afraid.

Was there anything more terrifying than what he had just experienced?

The man looked quite young and had a handsome face. His eyes were as cold as winter nights. He examined Shen Mo as he said, "You're awake."

Shen Mo did not reply.

The man continued, "The doctor said you're no longer in danger, but the injury on your right hand is the most serious. There might be long-term effects."

Shen Mo finally responded. His lips twitched, but he didn't ask about his hand. He only uttered two syllables instead, "Zhou Yang..."

The man's gaze seemed to grow even colder. "Zhou Yang is abroad. He's with my sister."

The man paused before adding, "My sister is Ji An'an."

Shen Mo immediately understood that he was talking about Miss Ji, Zhou Yang's childhood sweetheart. So this man… was Miss Ji's brother? Shen Mo couldn't help but look at him.

The man was also quietly gazing at Shen Mo.

"I forgot to introduce myself." The man raised his hand to smooth out his tie and said, "My name is Ji Mingxuan."

After hearing about Zhou Yang that day, Shen Mo didn't say anything at all for three entire days. When Ji Mingxuan visited him on the fourth day, he suddenly

said, “I want to call Zhou Yang.”

Ji Mingxuan frowned unnoticeably, but he still nodded and said, “Of course.”

Shen Mo could sit up on the bed already. But with one hand wrapped in gauze and the other attached to a drip, he couldn’t dial the number at all. Ji Mingxuan dialed Zhou Yang’s number for him.

Shen Mo remained extremely calm. From the beginning until the end, he only spoke three sentences to Zhou Yang.

“It’s me.”

“Let’s break up.”

“No reason. I’m just tired of it.”

And then, disregarding Zhou Yang’s interrogation from the other end of the call, Shen Mo looked at Ji Mingxuan calmly.

Ji Mingxuan understood and hung up. He eyed Shen Mo for a while before he asked, “Just like this, you’re breaking up with Zhou Yang?”

Shen Mo looked at his right hand, speaking as though the matter didn’t concern himself, “When they tortured me, they said if I didn’t break up with Zhou Yang, my family would be in trouble next.”

Ji Mingxuan rubbed the center of his brows and sat down on a chair by the bed. He said, “The abductors have already been arrested. When you feel better, the police will ask you for a statement.”

Shen Mo nodded and said, “Okay.” He then asked, “That day... were you the one who saved me, Mr. Ji?”

Ji Mingxuan paused for a few seconds before replying, “No. It was all because you called the police ahead of time that they made it in time.”

Shen Mo asked, “Mr. Ji, why did you pay all of the expensive medical bills for me?”

“Zhou Yang left with An’an. Take it as a kind of compensation.”

Shen Mo and Ji Mingxuan were strangers, so they had nothing else to talk about. Ji Mingxuan sat for a while before he left. Afterward, he sent his assistant to check up on Shen Mo several times, but he never showed up again.

A month later, Shen Mo recovered and left the hospital.

Apart from his right hand, which he still couldn’t freely use, only faint marks remained from his other wounds. However, he had nightmares every night.

He dreamed that he was running in the dark, while footsteps chased after him from behind, approaching closer and closer. He kept on calling the same number, but he could only hear busy beeps from the other end. Nobody ever picked up. Finally, a hand stretched out from the dark, wrapped around his ankle, and dragged him into an eternal hell.

Scared awake by the dream, Shen Mo couldn’t help but cry out, “Zhou Yang!”

The small rental was so empty that he could even hear his own echoes. He and Zhou Yang had decorated it together. Traces of Zhou Yang lurked everywhere, but he knew the man would never come back again.

Shen Mo began to experience insomnia every night. Whenever he closed his eyes, he felt as if he had returned to the abandoned warehouse. He called Zhou Yang’s name again and again, but no one ever came to save him.

Originally, he’d already found an art-related job, but now that his right hand was useless, the job was gone as well. Fortunately, he could still survive on some bread and instant noodles that were left at home. Every day, he stayed up until he could no

longer stand the fatigue, and when he woke up the next day, he stared blankly out the window. Sunrises and sunsets were meaningless to him. He didn't even know how long had passed.

It had only been a few days; it seemed as though it'd been a lifetime.

On that day, it had just rained, and the air after the rain felt quite refreshing. Shen Mo opened a packet of bread. Just as he was about to eat, the doorbell rang. He hadn't been in contact with anyone for a long time, which made his mind grow a little sluggish. It took him some time to open the door.

Outside the door stood a tall, slender man. Against the light, his face looked blurry, almost somewhat unreal.

But Shen Mo's heart, which had been numb for too long, suddenly sprang to life—it almost leaped out of his throat. He put his right hand behind his back, as though he was afraid it would scare the man. In the softest voice, he called, "Zhou Yang."

The man was somewhat surprised. He said, "I'm not Zhou Yang."

Shen Mo blinked once and examined the man as he asked, "Who else could you be?"

Speaking, he pulled the man into the house.

Since the house hadn't been cleaned in a few days, it was dirty and messy. Shen Mo took quite a while to clear up space for them to sit. He then said, "You said you were going out for just a couple of days. Why did it take you so long?"

But where had Zhou Yang been? How long had passed before he returned? Shen Mo could remember nothing.

The man didn't sit down. With folded arms, he only looked Shen Mo up and down before repeating, "I'm not Zhou Yang."

The man took a watch out of his pocket and said, "Someone found this in the old warehouse. I thought it might be yours, so I came to return it to you since I was passing by."

Shen Mo recognized it—it was a present from Zhou Yang. In a hurry, he accepted it and put it back on. Yet, he still couldn't remember when he'd lost the watch. As he thought about this, his right hand ached.

He didn't dare think about it any further. On the table was the bread that he had just unpacked. Noticing it, he brought it over and asked, "You didn't eat yet, did you? Let's have something together."

The man's expression changed the moment he saw the bread. He grabbed Shen Mo's hand and said, "You've been eating spoiled food?"

The man's grip made Shen Mo's wrist throb, and he couldn't help but flinch. Zhou Yang didn't like eating these things, he recalled. "I think there might still be some food in the fridge. I'll make some noodles for you."

As he spoke, Shen Mo struggled out of the man's hold. But just as he took a few steps toward the kitchen, he felt his head spin. His legs gave out, and he almost fell to the ground. Luckily, the man saw him and caught his arm in time.

Shen Mo felt somewhat embarrassed. "Maybe I stayed up too late yesterday."

He whispered again, "Zhou Yang..."

The man didn't correct Shen Mo this time. He only said, "If I didn't come today, you'd probably starve to death in this house and hit the headlines a few days later."

But Shen Mo still had some bread left, didn't he?

That was what Shen Mo thought, but before he had time to refute the man, the

latter had already dragged him out of the house. The man was so strong that Shen Mo couldn't break his hold no matter what. He could only follow him.

The man led Shen Mo to a car. Someone who seemed to be his assistant went out and brought back a bowl of steaming congee. Under supervision, Shen Mo had to finish it up.

Shen Mo felt a little strange. It was such a bright day, but everyone's face looked blurry for some reason. Of course, Zhou Yang was an exception. Even amid a crowd, he could recognize Zhou Yang with a single glance.

Zhou Yang was the man he loved with all his heart.

Thinking about this, Shen Mo's heart felt impossibly tender.

After he finished the congee, the man took him to the hospital. The doctor, who also had a blurry face, asked him some questions—some were extremely easy to answer, while others puzzled him. Once he answered all of the questions, he was brought somewhere to take some examinations. The man discussed his condition with the doctor before finally bringing him home, along with lots of medication.

Shen Mo fiddled with the bottles as he said, "I'm not sick."

The man glanced at Shen Mo and calmly said two words, "Take them."

For some reason, Shen Mo didn't dare go against what the man had said. He got himself some water and took medicine. The man never ended up taking a seat in the house. Right after Shen Mo finished taking the pills, the man opened the door and got ready to leave.

Shen Mo caught up to him and asked, "Zhou Yang, where are you going?"

The man stopped, looked back at Shen Mo, and said, "I just happened to pass by today. I won't come here again."

Shen Mo was confused.

The man seemed to hesitate momentarily before he slowly lifted his palm to Shen Mo's cheek. However, he didn't touch Shen Mo's face. Word by word, he stated, "Of course, Zhou Yang won't come either. Whether to continue escaping from reality or to face the truth, it's up to you."

Once he finished, the man withdrew his hand and left.

Shen Mo went downstairs and chased after him, watching him get in the car. In the end, Shen Mo wasn't able to catch up to the man. He didn't understand what had happened. Why had Zhou Yang left? They were so close.

His right hand ached again.

Shen Mo hurried to hold it with his other hand.

The sun only shone in the afternoon; it rained again in the evening. Shen Mo didn't go back to his rental. Empty-hearted, he stood in the passage downstairs. Even he didn't know what he was thinking about.

Although the rain wasn't heavy, it quickly dampened Shen Mo's clothes. Shrinking into his shoulders, Shen Mo still refused to leave.

He stayed awake all night. Only when dawn almost arrived did he sit down against the wall. People who got up early for work walked past him one after another, all looking at him as though he was a madman.

Shen Mo couldn't help considering it either. Had he really gone mad?

Today was still grim and gloomy. The rain was not heavy but rather lingering and ceaseless. Shen Mo's hair was drenched as well, and water kept on dripping down. He didn't even know what he was waiting for, but he waited with all his heart.

In the afternoon, a car drove by and stopped at the other side of the passage. Shen

Mo looked up before he lowered his head again.

When it was almost dusk, the rain grew heavier instead. The narrow eaves above Shen Mo's head couldn't keep out the rain at all now. Shen Mo still stayed in the same place, motionless. He didn't even think about standing up.

Like him, the car was also still stopped at the other side, unmoving.

When the sky completely darkened, the door of the car suddenly opened.

A man got out of the car.

As Shen Mo watched the man walk closer and closer to him, holding an umbrella, he could almost hear his own heartbeats.

The man finally stopped in front of Shen Mo, silently gazing at him.

Shen Mo stood up and hugged the man, crying out, "Zhou Yang!"

The man's body stiffened somewhat. After a long, long time, he sighed and gently returned the hug.

Shen Mo had been out in the rain for the whole day. Unsurprisingly, his temperature rose in the evening. He fell unconscious from the fever—he was only vaguely aware that a doctor came over and gave him an injection to bring down his temperature. In his dreams, he kept calling Zhou Yang's name. He remembered that once he'd also called Zhou Yang's name in such a way, but Zhou Yang had never showed up.

This time, though, someone sat by his bed, holding his hand firmly.

Shen Mo had a weak physique; he took several days to recover. By the time he could get out of bed, the house looked brand new to him. The living room had been cleaned up, the refrigerator had been filled with fresh vegetables and fruits, and some old furniture had been replaced as well. His Zhou Yang was sitting on the sofa for once, ordering the housekeeper to make him some congee.

Shen Mo walked over. "Zhou Yang."

The man gave an ambiguous answer. He took a few bottles of medicine from the table and handed them to Shen Mo, telling him, "Take these two after you eat. Two tablets each time, twice per day. Take this one before bed. Just one tablet is enough. And this one is…."

The man instructed Shen Mo how to take each bottle of medicine. Then, he said, "Take everything on time every day. I'll come over in three days and take you to the hospital for a return visit."

Shen Mo only processed the last sentence. He asked, "Are you leaving now?"

"That's right."

"Won't you stay?"

The man was quiet for a while before he replied, "I have work to do."

"But before…"

The man's phone rang before Shen Mo could finish speaking. The man answered the phone, listened for a few moments, and replied in a cool voice, "I understand. I'll head back to the office right now."

After the man hung up, he turned back to Shen Mo and added, "Remember to take the pills."

Shen Mo's lips moved. He still had so much to say, but in the end, he didn't say anything and only watched the man leave. After making some congee, the housekeeper left as well. Shen Mo ate the congee alone and took the pills. He had nothing to do, so he continued to stare out the window.

# Chapter 7

Quite some time passed before Shen Mo awoke from his dreams. The moment he opened his eyes, he scrambled to search for the man, only to find that he himself was lying on the bed in his bedroom already.

The living room was quiet. The light had been turned off long ago. In the dim moonlight, Shen Mo could see the man's silhouette atop the sofa. The man breathed steadily and seemed to be asleep.

Shen Mo still felt somewhat stunned as he raised his hand to touch his temple. There remained almost a faint warmth, due to which he couldn't tell if the kiss had been real or no more than a dream.

If real, why did Zhou Yang have to kiss him secretly?

If no more than a dream…

It was only natural. For so long, Shen Mo had been able to only look at the man, unable to do anything with him. Of course Shen Mo would dream about such a thing.

Recalling the strange excuses the man had come up with to evade sleeping together, Shen Mo let out a helpless sigh. He wrapped himself in his blanket and fell asleep again.

The temperature dropped as the end of the year approached. Apart from Shen Mo, who had nothing to do, everyone was busy. The man was especially preoccupied with work; he had been sleeping out for several nights. But he was still quite concerned about Shen Mo's right hand, making time to accompany Shen Mo to rehabilitation no matter what.

The man told Shen Mo ahead of time that he'd be spending New Year's with his family, so he could only spend Christmas together with Shen Mo.

Shen Mo was fine with that. He didn't really care for these so-called holidays, so it didn't matter to him whether or not he celebrated them. Now that the man had mentioned it, though, he began to consider it.

After all, Shen Mo had only injured his right hand, not anywhere else. He'd already knocked open the man's outer shell. It was time to taste the inside as well, wasn't it?

So on Christmas Eve, Shen Mo deliberately cooked a few of his best dishes and got a bottle of wine. He remembered that Zhou Yang's alcohol tolerance was... Fine, he couldn't quite remember. But Zhou Yang wasn't a heavyweight, was he?

Of course, the man also got off work early. When he came back and saw the table full of dishes, he revealed no emotion on the surface. At an unhurried pace, he sat down and began to dine, almost as though he intended to finish every single one of the dishes.

Shen Mo took the initiative and poured some wine for the man, asking, "When are you leaving?"

The man had said he'd go abroad to accompany his family.

"A few days later. After I finish the work at hand." The man's chopsticks never stopped moving as he glanced at Shen Mo and said, "You'll be home alone..."

"It's okay." Shen Mo replied after some thought, "I also want to pay a visit home."

The man nodded. "Yes. You should."

The man then added, "I'll have my assistant book the tickets for you."

"Don't worry about it. It's in a neighboring city."

Shen Mo's right hand began to healing gradually.

After several months of rehabilitation, the injury to his right hand no longer affected his daily life, even though his hand still trembled slightly when he held a paintbrush. The doctor said that this was due to psychological factors; it'd recover sooner or later as long as he did his exercises properly. His ability to recognize people had also improved—he could already distinguish the man's two assistants. However, the man still made him go to the hospital for regular rehabilitation.

The man hadn't slept on the sofa since New Year's. As the days grew warmer, Shen Mo's heart blossomed as well. He felt that this was the happiest he'd ever been. He was in such high spirits that he almost couldn't recall much of what had happened in the past.

As Shen Mo practiced using his right hand, he also looked up recruitment information online. He was searching for positions related to painting, hoping he could get a job after his hand recovered. After all, they'd already graduated college and entered society. Now that they were beginning to age, they had to face reality sooner or later. Zhou Yang's family probably wouldn't let them stay together. If the man also got kicked out by his family, then he would at least be able to live off Shen Mo.

When Shen Mo mentioned this plan at the dinner table later, the man couldn't help but laugh.

Shen Mo glared at the man, somewhat angered.

Seeing this, the man quickly changed his attitude and said, "Okay, okay. I'll live off you."

Only then was Shen Mo satisfied.

Shen Mo reckoned that at this rate, it was just a matter of time before his right hand fully recovered, and he'd soon be able to paint again. He had made up his mind long ago that Zhou Yang would be his first subject. After all, the man looked handsome from every angle.

Often, as the man read documents on the sofa, Shen Mo eyed him quietly from the side, considering the composition of the painting. The glow of the sunset splashed onto the man's face, drawing a faint light over his features. Shen Mo thought that the side of the man's face was particularly charming.

As Shen Mo mused, the man seemed to notice Shen Mo's gaze. He looked up and smiled at Shen Mo.

Shen Mo was somewhat surprised.

The man had already stood up. He strode toward Shen Mo, bent down, and kissed Shen Mo on the lips. Then, he straightened up and went back to reading the documents as if nothing had happened.

On the other hand, Shen Mo blushed from what the man had done and slipped into the kitchen to cook.

A few days later, the sky cleared up. Spring could be felt everywhere.

Shen Mo washed all of their winter clothes and blankets before drying them in the sun. Remembering how his tools were still locked in the cabinet, he fished them out and put them in order. When the man found out that Shen Mo was going to paint again, he even suggested buying him a new set. However, Shen Mo turned down the offer as he was more familiar with his old tools.

After sorting out the art tools, Shen Mo tidied up the cabinet as well. The rental

was quite small; the cabinet was filled with miscellaneous things, from fever medicine to bug spray. Shen Mo threw away everything he deemed useless. As he rummaged through the cabinet, he happened to find an album.

His previous photos had all been left in his hometown. This album only contained some photos from high school and college. The moment Shen Mo opened it, a graduation photo fell out.

It was a high school graduation photo. Now that Shen Mo thought about it, it'd been several years since then already. Right at first glance, he recognized himself in the photo, wearing his school uniform and really short bangs. Because he wasn't too tall, he had stood in one of the front rows. He looked for Zhou Yang next. Yet, even after searching around, he wasn't able to find the familiar face.

Strange. Hadn't Zhou Yang taken part in the graduation photoshoot?

Shen Mo could remember that he and Zhou Yang had used to be high school classmates. He had fallen in love with Zhou Yang and started pursuing him first. However, there were many details that he was unable to recall. As one would expect, he couldn't recall if Zhou Yang had taken part in the graduation photoshoot either.

Shen Mo knew it was because he was sick. But it didn't matter. He'd taken many casual photos with Zhou Yang as well. He'd printed out all of them and put them inside the album.

Shen Mo had nothing else to do, so he sat down and flipped through the album.

He didn't take photos often. Most of the photos had been taken at school, although a few had been taken on vacation. Some were single photos while others were group photos, but most were of him and one other person.

As Shen Mo went through the photos one after another, his heart seemed to sink below a cold lake, sending chills all across his body.

He was smiling so happily in the photos, especially when it came to shots of him and that other person. The affection seeping from his eyes was impossible to hide.

But that person wasn't Zhou Yang.

Or, not the man he had been living with and sleeping beside.

Shen Mo's palms sweat uncontrollably.

Who was this man?

Shen Mo pulled himself together before picking up the high school graduation photo and comparing it with the rest of the photos. This time, he looked at it carefully, scrutinizing one face after another. Finally, he found a set of similar features—on the person standing two rows behind him. This was his high school classmate indeed.

If this person wasn't Zhou Yang, why did they associate with each other so often?

But if this person was really Zhou Yang…

Without a doubt, it'd be even more terrifying.

Shen Mo sat on the chair, absent-minded. The beautiful springtime rays shone on him, but he couldn't feel a single hint of warmth. He tried his best to remember, but as though a veil was hanging before him, everything seemed hazy and unreal.

Shen Mo could remember that he and Zhou Yang had used to be high school classmates, that they had fallen in love with each other, that... No matter what, he couldn't remember Zhou Yang's face. It seemed that something had happened in the middle, and he and Zhou Yang had been forced apart. Then, his right hand was injured, and he began to live alone in the rental. Every night, the same nightmare

repeated itself over and over again. He was too afraid to fall asleep.

Until that day, he was about to open a pack of moldy bread when he heard the doorbell ring. He walked over to open the door in a trance and saw the man standing outside the door.

That had been his Zhou Yang, of course.

Shen Mo pressed his palm against his chest. Even now, he could recall that throb in his heart. Who could have rescued him, apart from Zhou Yang?

As for why he couldn't see the man's face too clearly back then, it had only been because of his illness. Now that he was getting better, he knew that the man looked handsome, or at least much better than the nobodies in the photo.

In reality, it was easy to confirm the matter. All he had to do was to ask a high school classmate. But Shen Mo still sat there and didn't move. He felt somewhat afraid. He hoped that it was just some kind of misunderstanding. But if…

He didn't even dare think about it.

The afternoon passed quickly. As the sun went down, there came the familiar sound of the opening door. Shen Mo jumped up from his chair. He had used to look forward to this sound so much, but now he was scared for no reason. He hurried to shove the photos back inside the cabinet.

The man pushed open the door and entered the house. He wore a dark suit, his features the same as Shen Mo remembered. Seeing Shen Mo standing beside the cabinet, the man smiled and asked, "Tidying things up again?"

Shen Mo exclaimed, "Ah." He only stared at the man's face.

"What's wrong?" The man walked toward Shen Mo and took Shen Mo's hand, frowning. "Why is your hand so cold?"

Even the man's touch made Shen Mo nervous. Panicking, he didn't know how to respond.

The man asked, "Are you tired?"

And so Shen Mo replied, "Yeah, a little."

"I know you want to start painting again, but don't push yourself too hard. Just let nature take its course."

"I know."

Shen Mo's right hand had long since gotten better, but the man still rubbed it between his palms out of habit. He asked, "Where's dinner?"

Only then did Shen Mo realize, "Oh, I forgot to make it."

"You lose track of time whenever you think about painting, don't you?" The man smiled and said, "Let's get delivery."

In the evening, the two ate together. Shen Mo tried to act naturally, but his limbs were still somewhat stiff. He wondered if the man had noticed.

Shen Mo took a shower after dinner. When he came out, he saw that, quite naturally, the man had already gotten into bed. Neither of them had slept alone since New Year's, but it was different now. If the man wasn't Zhou Yang…

Feeling his throat tense, Shen Mo was reluctant to get in bed. Only after the man urged him several times did he finally lie down.

The man turned off the light and reached out to wrap his arms around Shen Mo, calling in the dark, "Shen Mo."

"Yeah?"

Shen Mo replied cautiously. He thought that the man had noticed something, but instead he heard the man say, "Your birthday is in a few days. What do you want as

a present?"

Birthday?

Oh, right. His birthday was this month.

Shen Mo had almost forgotten about this. He thought for a while before he replied, "I never go out of my way to celebrate my birthday. There's no need to bother."

The man seemed to have known what Shen Mo would say. A grin could be heard in his voice, "I'll do as I see fit, then."

The man wasn't aware of anything. All he cared about was celebrating Shen Mo's birthday.

Shen Mo's heart throbbed, almost as though it was sizzling atop a fire.

His eyes stayed open, and he didn't sleep. Only when the man next to him fell asleep, breathing steadily, did he carefully move the man's arm away. He turned around to sleep on the edge of the bed.

The man reached out for him in vain, murmuring in his sleep, "Shen Mo."

Shen Mo gritted his teeth and didn't respond.

The man even knew when his birthday was. How could he be anyone but Zhou Yang?

But if, if the man was really a complete stranger...

Why did he pretend to be Zhou Yang?

Why did he treat him so tenderly?

Shen Mo couldn't help but tremble. As the long night approached, he wrapped himself in the blanket and hugged himself tightly.

But he still felt cold.

The next day, Shen Mo woke up in warm arms. However he'd fallen asleep last night, he'd ended up rolling into the man's arms again.

The man had woken up earlier than Shen Mo. Lowering his head, he kissed the top of Shen Mo's head and said, "I'll be working overtime these few days. I can take a day off during the weekend and spend some time outside with you."

The weekend was Shen Mo's birthday.

Shen Mo felt a thud in his heart. He kept silent in the man's arms.

The man added, "Do you remember that painting of yours from before? It was a vision of your dream home."

Absently, Shen Mo said, "Really? I don't remember."

A painting with such a definite subject had probably been an assignment from university. Even he himself didn't remember it—how could somebody else know?

But the man embraced him gently and stated, "Yes. There *was* something like that."

The man pressed his chest against Shen Mo's back. Their heartbeats almost seemed to overlap.

Shen Mo almost yielded to the warmth of this affection. However, after the man got up and went to work, Shen Mo still cleaned himself up and visited the hospital. He met with his usual doctor. The examination showed that his illness was well under control, although he still had to take medicine.

Shen Mo asked carefully, "With this illness... is it possible for me to mistake someone for someone else?"

The doctor answered with much reservation, "Those with serious PTSD may choose to avoid reality and forget certain things or people. As for whether or not it's

possible for them to mistake one person for someone else, it depends on the specific circumstances."

Hearing this, Shen Mo already guessed as to what had happened.

He had indeed lost some of his memories. Just what in the world had happened for him to have forgotten even Zhou Yang's face? To have, to have even mistaken a stranger for Zhou Yang?

The most straightforward solution was to ask the man about it. But the man had to work overtime for the next few days, leaving early and returning late every day. Shen Mo didn't even have the chance to meet him face-to-face.

It wasn't until Friday evening that the man came home early. The moment he saw Shen Mo, he asked, "Should we order cake for tomorrow?"

He was still thinking about Shen Mo's birthday.

Shen Mo shook his head and said, "No. I'll just cook a few more dishes tomorrow."

Glancing at the man's face, Shen Mo asked deliberately, "What do you like to eat?"

Oblivious, the man casually mentioned a few dishes.

Shen Mo made the comparison in his mind—those weren't dishes that Zhou Yang liked. The truth was already so close, and yet he instead began to hesitate, reluctant to expose the man right there.

To make time for the special day, the man had compressed several days' work. Even now, he hadn't finished working yet. He took out his laptop to write emails.

Shen Mo sat at the side and watched the man quietly. For many nights, he had gazed at the side of the man's face like this, planning the composition of his painting.

But he hadn't even had time to finish the painting yet.

Shen Mo felt a soreness in his chest. Finally, he called, "Zhou Yang!"

The man paused, lifting his head slowly. He didn't respond and only gave Shen Mo one glance. His eyes were dark. His gaze was as cold as a snowy winter night as it collided with Shen Mo's heart.

Shen Mo felt as though a cold hand had clenched around his heart. Pain seeped from the cracks of his bones. He heard himself say in a hoarse voice, "You're not Zhou Yang."

The man didn't say anything.

The living room was quiet apart from the ticking of the wall clock. Shen Mo had never known that time could pass so slowly. Moments later, the man shut his laptop and loosened his tie, declaring, "That's right. Of course not."

Shen Mo had prepared himself for it, but after he heard this, his ears still buzzed. He took quite some time to regain his composure.

The man stood up from the sofa and walked toward him, calling, "Shen Mo?"

The man reached out to touch his face.

Startled, Shen Mo couldn't help but dodge to the side.

The man's hand stopped in the air. A while later, he drew it back.

Shen Mo looked up and asked the man, "If you're not Zhou Yang, why did you pretend to be him?"

"I pretended to be Zhou Yang?" The man uttered something between a snort and a laugh. He said, "You were the one who mistook me for him first, weren't you?"

Shen Mo was speechless. According to his own memory, he was indeed the one

who had mistaken the man for Zhou Yang first. He could vaguely recall that the man had even denied it several times. But he had been ill back then—how could he act rationally?

"You could have left me alone and let me look after myself. Or, if you were kinder, you could have just taken me to the hospital. Why did you pretend to be Zhou Yang?"

The man took Shen Mo's hand. Shen Mo's right hand had been injured. Even though it'd healed, some scars still remained. The man stroked the scars tenderly and said, "At first, I was afraid that you might starve to death alone in this house, so I visited you from time to time. But later, I realized how stubborn your temper is. I couldn't leave you alone. And after that…."

Shen Mo asked, "And after that?"

The man put Shen Mo's hand to his lips, almost as though it was a kiss. He gazed at Shen Mo and asked, "Do you really not know? Why I stayed by your side?"

As if realizing something, Shen Mo whispered, "Don't say it…."

But the man had already bent over to kiss Shen Mo's lips. "Because I love you, Shen Mo."

Shen Mo gasped, scrambling to escape the kiss. He stepped back again and again until his back was against the wall. The man reached forward and trapped Shen Mo in his arms.

Running his fingers through Shen Mo's hair, the man said, "Dr. Tang called me two days ago. I'd already guessed that you'd recover soon."

The surname of Shen Mo's doctor was Tang. It was then that Shen Mo realized the man knew everything but had only pretended that nothing was wrong.

"It's good that you've woken up to it, really. It's not as if you could have lived in your memories for the rest of your life, anyway." The man added in a gentler tone, "Shen Mo. Pack up your things. Let's go."

Shen Mo was confused. "Go? Go where?"

The man smiled. Little by little, the tip of his nose came up to Shen Mo's face. Amid an indescribable softness, he said, "You'll see when we arrive."

Shen Mo had used to like it when the man smiled like this.

No, no, no—at that time, he'd thought that the man was Zhou Yang. But now, the man was no more than a nameless stranger.

Shen Mo closed his eyes for a moment and said, "No. I can't leave."

"Why not?"

"I have to stay here and wait for Zhou Yang."

Shen Mo let out those words without thinking. When he finished, he saw the smile in the man's eyes turn cold.

"Zhou Yang went abroad. You broke up a long time ago."

Shen Mo didn't possess this piece of memory, but he unconsciously shook his head. "No. Zhou Yang and I are only apart for the time being."

The man kept quiet for a moment before he suddenly asked, "What about me, Shen Mo?"

Shen Mo's heart quivered as though it was immersed in seawater, half cold and half warm, floating and unable to touch the shore. Yet, he continued, "I thought you were Zhou Yang… The person I love has always been Zhou Yang…."

Before Shen Mo could finish speaking, the man silenced him with a kiss.

Unlike the gentle peck from before, the man was anxious and aggressive this

time. He quickly took Shen Mo's mouth by force, as though he wanted to rob Shen Mo of all air, leaving no room for Shen Mo to breathe.

Shen Mo almost thought he'd die like this. He couldn't help but struggle, biting down hard on the man's lip.

As their tongues entangled, a metallic taste spread throughout their mouths. The man only let out a muffled groan. He didn't move at all, still gripping Shen Mo's shoulders as he kissed Shen Mo.

Shen Mo managed to back off a little, calling vaguely, "Zhou Yang—"

The man suddenly stopped.

His lips were still against Shen Mo's. He seemed to tremble slightly. Only a few moments later did he slowly draw away. A scarlet trace of blood had been left by Shen Mo's bite, making his face seem even paler.

Shen Mo had never seen the man look like this before.

But the man quickly concealed his emotions. He let go of Shen Mo, regaining his usual composure. Even his voice sounded calm and restrained. "Yes. The person you love is Zhou Yang."

The man casually wiped the blood from his lips and straightened up. "It's unsuitable for me to stay the night, isn't it?

Shen Mo didn't know what to say in reply. He'd just been living his days, and the person sleeping next to him had suddenly become someone else. Who in the world would know what to do? His thoughts were in a mess.

But the man had already nodded, saying to himself, "Of course you won't come with me. I'm the one who should go."

The man looked so composed, displaying no anger at all on the surface. As calm as usual, he took his laptop from the table and walked out of the door.

Shen Mo's legs moved on their own; he followed the man for a few steps. He didn't stop until he reached the door.

He didn't even know who the man was. Why had he tried to follow the man just like that? At least he had to retrieve his memories and figure out what had happened between Zhou Yang and him.

Shen Mo sat back down on the sofa.

It started raining outside. The raindrops rustled. He and Zhou Yang had furnished this house together, but now the shadows of another man lurked in every corner.

Shen Mo didn't know how long had passed when he heard the doorbell ring again. He rushed to open the door. Outside stood the man who'd returned once again.

For a moment, Shen Mo was stunned.

The man should have driven here, but he'd been rained upon for some reason. His clothes were drenched. Water dripped from the ends of his hair. Even his eyes seemed to have been dipped in rain as they gazed at Shen Mo deeply.

Shen Mo opened his mouth, but he didn't let out a sound.

The man didn't enter the house. He only took Shen Mo's hand and stuffed a delicate box in its grasp. "I prepared this present a long time ago. I was going to show it to you in person…."

The rain was loud. Like a veil hung between them, his voice sounded somewhat unreal.

"You can go take a look on your own, or…."

Surrounded by watery mist, the man approached Shen Mo.

# Chapter 8

Shen Mo only had a bowl of noodles on his birthday. He boiled the noodles in nothing but water and added no ingredients. Along with some soy sauce, sesame oil, and chopped green onions, he ate the noodles alone in the small rental.

If he hadn't revealed the man's identity yesterday, the current scene would definitely be different.

Shen Mo looked at the present box on the table as he ate.

It was a common present box, well-packaged and adorned with a beautiful bow on its lid. Imagining how earnest the straight-faced man must have looked while choosing this packaging, Shen Mo was somewhat amused.

Shen Mo had already opened the box last night. Inside it was a key and a note. The handwriting on the note, with which he wasn't familiar, must belong to the man. An address was plainly written on the note—the address was located in Jinxiu Villa, a famous residential area in the city, known for being well-located and tremendously expensive. Shen Mo had heard of it long ago, but he hadn't been there before.

Shen Mo knew how much effort the man must have spent on preparing the present. These feelings shouldn't be treated disrespectfully. So he closed the box again and put it away, planning to make his decision once he figured out what had happened between him and Zhou Yang.

The sky still looked gloomy today. It seemed as if it would rain soon. Shen Mo looked out the window. The man must be waiting for him in Jinxiu Villa.

For how long would the man wait?

A week? A month? Or even longer?

Shen Mo shook his head and stopped himself from thinking further. After he finished the noodles, he looked up Zhou Yang's number on his phone and made a call.

Zhou Yang's number remained powered off.

Shen Mo dialed the number over and over again. He felt that this had happened before, but he couldn't remember anything about it. He could only give up. Instead, he contacted several high school classmates and asked them about Zhou Yang.

"Zhou Yang? I haven't been in touch with him since we graduated."

"I don't know."

"I don't know. You were closer to Zhou Yang, weren't you? I used to see you two together all the time."

Only one classmate said, "I heard he went abroad."

The man had also said that Zhou Yang had gone abroad.

If it was true, Shen Mo had no idea what to do next. He didn't even know where Zhou Yang had gone. And, he couldn't go abroad chasing after Zhou Yang, could he? Although he had Zhou Yang's family address in his address book, he couldn't go straight to Zhou Yang's family. He'd probably be kicked out the moment he reached the gates.

Did he and Zhou Yang have to end just like this, with no explanation or whatsoever?

Shen Mo glanced at the box on the table before he made a few more calls, unwilling to give up. Of course, he didn't hear any more news about Zhou Yang. It had been so many years since they'd graduated from high school. Most of his classmates came from ordinary families. They lived in a completely different world

from Zhou Yang's.

In reality, he was the same.

Shen Mo knew that their relationship had been precarious. Every day, he felt as though he was walking a tightrope. If he weren't truly in love with Zhou Yang, he could never have persevered until now.

At this point, Shen Mo suddenly remembered someone—a person who had helped him and Zhou Yang handle the procedures when they had rented this place. Zhou Yang had said it was more convenient this way so that they wouldn't be found out. Shen Mo recalled that the person, surnamed Fang, had been a middle-aged man wearing gold-rimmed glasses and a polite expression. Zhou Yang had called him Fang-shu* and told Shen Mo that he'd worked at the Zhou family's enterprise.

*Translator's Note: A suffix for referring to an older man.

The person had had quite a good relationship with Zhou Yang. He must know where Zhou Yang had gone.

With a goal in mind, Shen Mo could finally calm down. He went to bed early in the evening. Before he fell asleep, he glanced out the window. He seemed to catch sight of the familiar car, but the car disappeared again in an instant.

It was probably no more than an illusion.

Shen Mo got up early the next day. He cleaned himself up and headed out. The Zhou family's company building was in the city center, so Shen Mo went there by bus. Once he walked through the splendid glass doors, receptionists welcomed him with sweet smiles at the front desk.

Shen Mo walked over calmly, pretending that he had come for business. Indirectly, he inquired about Fang-shu.

"You mean Secretary Fang, don't you? His office is on the sixth floor."

"Thank you."

After expressing his thanks, Shen Mo turned around and pressed the elevator button. While he waited, someone else came through the doors. It was a woman with elegant features, wearing a befitting outfit and a set of pearl jewelry. She wasn't young, but there was a sophisticated air to her.

The receptionists all put on respectful expressions the moment they saw her.

The elevator rang as its doors opened. Only after Shen Mo stepped into the elevator did he realize who the lady was. She was Zhou Yang's mother,—Mrs. Zhou was born to a wealthy family and went to great lengths to get what she wanted. Shen Mo had once seen her photo on Zhou Yang's phone.

As Shen Mo walked into the elevator, Mrs. Zhou gave him one glance.

Shen Mo met her eyes. His chest suddenly tightened.

In the nightmares that repeated themselves over and over again, a scar-faced man had also looked at him in the same way, stepping on his hand with a grim smile as he said something besides his ear. He couldn't hear any sound in his dreams. Only now did he remember what the sentence was.

"We're just teaching you a lesson this time. Don't ever think of seeing Zhou Yang again. He's out of your league."

No—it wasn't just a nightmare!

It had really happened. He was abducted and beaten up, his fingers were crushed... And the Zhou family had been behind everything!

The elevator stopped again. Not knowing which floor he was on, Shen Mo bolted the moment the doors opened. His head throbbed in pain. Many memories surged

up, tangling up his thoughts.

As though countless voices talked right beside his ears.

“Get away from Zhou Yang!”

“Or your family will be in trouble next.”

“Mr. Zhou went abroad with Miss Ji...”

Yes. And there had been Miss Ji.

Pressing one hand against the wall, Shen Mo took a few steps forward. He saw an emergency exit, so he went back down using the stairs.

He remembered many fragments: he had been walking alone on his way home, and a car came up to him from behind… the abandoned warehouse, the endless torture… and in the hospital, he broke up with Zhou Yang on the phone…

As well as…

As well as the man who visited him in the hospital. The man had a handsome face and a pair of eyes as cold as the night. The man said that his surname was Ji, and that he was Miss Ji’s older brother.

No, no, no… That wasn’t the first time they met!

Even before what had happened at the hospital, he’d seen that face before.

Only a few more steps remained on the staircase. Shen Mo was so absent-minded that he accidentally slipped and fell hard. The moment he crashed onto the ground, a scene flashed across his eyes—

In the abandoned warehouse, he was curled up on the ground. His right hand was badly hurt. Just as he thought he was going to die, the door that had been tightly shut suddenly opened. A ray of light shined through. The man outside the door stood against the light with blurry features. Shen Mo saw the man walking toward him. Little by little, the man’s face grew clearer.

The man who had rescued him.

Shen Mo’s head ached even more, but he finally remembered the man’s name.

—Ji Mingxuan.

Shen Mo woke up from his dreams.

The sun was almost down. The remaining sunset shone warmly on his body. He had taken a nap on the grass in the park, and pieces of grass were now stuck to his hair and clothes. He looked quite funny; passersby who saw him all smiled kindly at him. Shen Mo didn’t mind it, though, smiling back at them. He stood up and picked up the drawing board on the ground.

He had begun to paint again several years ago, trying to paint with his left hand. He practiced slowly. Even though he hadn’t yet caught up to the expertise of his past self, he was satisfied with himself anyway. He had come out to sketch today, but the sunshine had been so good that he couldn’t help but fall asleep. He had never expected to dream of something that had happened so long ago.

After he packed away all of his tools, Shen Mo put on his backpack and strode out of the park. He had a studio at Yongning Road. When he’d broken up with Ji Mingxuan that year, Ji Mingxuan had given him the property. Later, he’d simply renovated it and opened a small studio. The business was neither good nor bad, but it was enough for him to get by.

Due to the rush hour, traffic was heavy on his way back. When Shen Mo reached the studio, the sky had already darkened completely. He’d hired a young girl to help him with the studio. When Yang Yue saw Shen Mo come back so late, a slightly

irked expression showed on her face. “Boss, you were out lazing around again!”

Mild-tempered, Shen Mo put away his things as he said, “Sorry for coming back so late. Did I keep you from your date with your boyfriend? You can get off work now.”

Yang Yue had gotten this job after graduating college. Having worked here for a few years now, she was now quite familiar with Shen Mo. She hurriedly reapplied her makeup as she asked, “What are you eating tonight, boss? Takeout again?”

“That’s right.”

“Curry rice again?”

“Yeah,” Shen Mo replied, adding, “I like curry.”

“No matter how much you like it, you can’t have it every day.” Yang Yue put down her pressed powder. As though she had gone through it all, she advised, “You’re already thirty, boss. It’s time for you to get yourself a girlfriend, isn’t it?”

Shen Mo was surprised for a moment. “I’m not even twenty-nine yet.”

But to spry young girls, what was the difference between twenty-nine and thirty?

“Twenty-nine makes you an old man already.” Yang Yue picked up her eyebrow pencil and filled in her brows. “The older you are, the less popular you’ll be when it comes to dating.”

Shen Mo replied, “I haven’t met the right person.”

“Should I introduce someone to you? One of my old classmates from college….”

Shen Mo hurriedly turned her down. “I’m okay.”

“I’ve been here for almost three years, and I haven’t ever seen you with a girlfriend.” Yang Yue suddenly leaned over, staring at Shen Mo as she asked, “Boss, don’t tell me there’s already someone in your heart?”

She had just penciled in her eyebrows. Her two arched brows looked as dark as ink.

For a moment, Shen Mo’s mind was elsewhere. He couldn’t answer.

Yang Yue was the kind of young girl who loved to gossip. At once, her interest was piqued. She guessed, “Your first love? Or your crush? Or a goddess you’ve been chasing after for years?”

As Shen Mo recalled that dream from not long ago, his heart started beating faster. But he’d already learned how to control his emotions. He still looked calm on the surface.

“No,” worried that Yang Yue wouldn’t believe it—or perhaps that he himself wouldn’t believe it—he reiterated, “there’s no such person.”

Yang Yue couldn’t be fooled so easily. Just as she was about to dig deeper, she heard a honk from outside the door.

“Oh, my boyfriend’s here to pick me up. I’ll be off, then. Bye-bye, boss!”

Now that her boyfriend had come, Yang Yue immediately waved her hand. She left “old man” Shen Mo and dashed out with her handbag.

Shen Mo watched her leave before turning away to order delivery. He actually wasn’t terrible at cooking, but he was too lazy to cook now that he was living alone—delivery was more convenient. The curry rice soon arrived. After he ate dinner, he had to deal with some chores. There were almost no customers around this time, so he closed the studio, set up his drawing board, and continued working on his unfinished painting.

During his afternoon at the park, he had already completed most of it. Amid the silence of the night, it was also particularly easy to concentrate. He soon finished

coloring the painting. Putting down his paintbrush, Shen Mo stepped back to look at it. He felt quite satisfied with how it had turned out.

But he still hadn't signed it.

Shen Mo hesitated for a while before he picked up his paintbrush again. He changed it from his right hand to his left hand, and then from his left back to his right. His right hand still trembled slightly as he held the paintbrush, but he tried his best to control his grip. One stroke after another, he wrote the two characters "*Shen Mo*." The signature was a little different from what it had used to be, but the style remained the same.

Looking at these two characters, Shen Mo almost couldn't stop himself from remembering that day a few years ago. He had opened the door of the study at Jinxiu Villa only to find a room filled with his paintings.

Some were work from university, some were commissioned portraits, and some were no more than doodles. He didn't know how much time and money the man had spent on collecting these pieces.

... So that was the secret of Jinxiu Villa.

At that moment, Shen Mo knew he must have lost some parts of his past.

After breaking up with Zhou Yang back then, Shen Mo had spent over half of the year in a trance. He had wanted to ask Ji Mingxuan about it, but when he finally got in touch with Ji Mingxuan, Ji Mingxuan refused to see him. In the end, he could only pay a visit to the hospital. Only with the help of a therapist was he able to remember what had happened.

He had once held the man's heart, but he had let go of it.

Back when he had fallen from the stairs, Shen Mo was taken to the hospital by the building's security guard. Fortunately, he wasn't seriously injured. Apart from some external injuries, he only suffered a slight concussion. He was dizzy for a few days, during which his memory was a mess. Although he remembered having been abducted, he'd lost all memory of what had happened in the few months after it.

And Ji Mingxuan... had truly become a stranger to him.

Later, when his rent expired and he almost had to live on the street, Ji Mingxuan gave him a contract. Only then did the two of them cross paths again.

Once Shen Mo retrieved his memories, he was eager to see Ji Mingxuan. He didn't know how to contact Ji Mingxuan now that Ji Mingxuan was abroad, so he could only turn to Mr. Chen. Mr. Chen was quite kind—after some difficulties and communication, Shen Mo finally got in touch with Ji Mingxuan again.

But Ji Mingxuan didn't want to see him.

Only after Shen Mo contacted Ji Mingxuan a few more times did Ji Mingxuan reply to him through Mr. Chen, "Don't trouble yourself."

Mr. Chen also said euphemistically, "Miss Ji's condition isn't too well."

Shen Mo felt a coldness in his chest. He knew that everything had already come to an end.

No matter his lost memories or Ji Mingxuan's secret love, Shen Mo didn't need to pursue anything further. Ji An'an would always come between him and Ji Mingxuan. From now on, he and Ji Mingxuan would be in two different worlds. They did not need to see each other again.

On the afternoon of that day, Shen Mo calmly thanked Mr. Chen and moved out of Ji Mingxuan's house. As for the things that Ji Mingxuan had given him, he only made use of the shop on Yongning Road. In the next few years, he opened a studio

and started painting again. Time had passed by so quietly, almost as if he had never known Ji Mingxuan in the first place.

It was just that he still dreamed of these things, once in a while.

Shen Mo laughed at himself. Seeing how late it had already become, he felt it was time to go home and rest. After hastily packing up his things, just as he was about to leave, he caught a glimpse of the calendar on the wall. It was already late January. A few days later would be the Lunar New Year, and after that would be the start of spring.

Shen Mo stared at the date for a while before he slowly drew back his gaze.

He was a little absent-minded on his way home. Once he got back, he took a shower and opened up his laptop as usual, surfing the web. When he realized it, he had already booked a plane ticket.

It was a ticket to a small overseas island on the fourth of February.

When Shen Mo told Yang Yue about this the next day, Yang Yue's cheeks puffed up again. "You're going abroad for a trip? You're too lazy, Boss. You go out to have fun around this time every single year."

Shen Mo could only say, "You can go on your annual leave when I come back."

Only then did Yang Yue brighten up a little, asking, "Where are you going this time, Boss?"

"The same place."

"S Island again?" Yang Yue was somewhat surprised. "But it's a honeymoon resort. Only couples go there. You're single, so why do you still go there every year? Are you waiting for a love affair or trying to steal somebody else's girlfriend?"

Shen Mo had a convincing reason. "I'm at a creativity block. I'm going to get some inspiration."

As expected, Yang Yue had nothing else to say. She only asked, "When are you leaving?"

"The flight is on the fourth of February."

Going through the calendar, Yang Yue said, "It'll be the start of spring that day."

She then exclaimed, "Huh," and asked, "If I remember correctly, you always head out around the start of spring, boss. Is there some special meaning to it?"

As though she had picked up on something, she turned back to Shen Mo.

Shen Mo's heart skipped a beat, but he was still wearing a smile on his face. "Of course there is. Spring is the beginning of the year. Everything comes to life in spring. All kinds of flowers bloom. It's a great time to take a trip."

Hearing this, Yang Yue didn't ask any further. Shen Mo used this opportunity to tell her to make a cup of coffee.

Not before long, Yang Yue brought the coffee over. Shen Mo hadn't slept well last night; taking in the coffee's aroma, he still felt somewhat sleepy. As noon approached, the shadow of the coffee cup stretched long beneath the sunlight. With half-closed eyes, Shen Mo gazed out the window—this was the most at ease he'd ever felt.

But amid the serenity, Shen Mo still felt that something was missing. No matter how happy he was, there was no contentment. Perhaps, just as Yang Yue had said, a certain name had rooted in his heart. It had sprouted and grown over the years, springing up whenever he wasn't paying attention and sprawling across his chest.

He had never missed a person so much.

# Chapter 9

Four years ago, right after Zhou Yang had returned to China, he had called Shen Mo once, asking to meet Shen Mo at the usual place. He said he wanted to elope with Shen Mo.

Of course, Shen Mo didn't go.

But Shen Mo didn't go to work either. He even turned off his phone, locking himself at home as he did a thorough clean of his place.

That day, Ji Mingxuan came back reeking alcohol. Having gotten drunk and tripped on his way home, he was quite an embarrassing mess. He almost didn't recognize Shen Mo when he saw him, and even after he did, he still behaved rather unusually, pinning Shen Mo down on the sofa and fucking him hard. When he bit down on Shen Mo's neck, Shen Mo felt almost as though he'd become prey to Ji Mingxuan.

The two slept until noon the next day. Ji Mingxuan helped Shen Mo ask for leave using Shen Mo's phone. Right after the phone was turned on, a series of text notifications sounded. Shen Mo assumed the messages were sent by Zhou Yang, and Ji Mingxuan smiled at him, deleting the text messages in front of his eyes.

In the afternoon, Shen Mo took Ji Mingxuan's car to buy medicine. He then heard from the driver that Ji Mingxuan had originally wanted to go to Jinxiu Villa that night.

Shen Mo hadn't known what Mr. Ji had been thinking back then, but he understood everything now. Thinking Shen Mo had gone with Zhou Yang, Ji Mingxuan had gotten dead drunk. He'd texted Shen Mo, asking Shen Mo to stay, and then deleted each message by his own hand.

Although Shen Mo's memories had long since been restored, memories were still no more than memories. At this moment, he understood clearer than ever that somebody had once loved him to the bone.

For so long, Ji Mingxuan had waited for him at Jinxiu Villa.

But he had never shown up.

"Uncle," at the side, Ji Ning shook Shen Mo's arm, quietly asking, "are you crying?"

"No." Shen Mo recovered himself. He wiped the tears from the phone screen and replied, "I'm not."

Ji Ning was young, but he wasn't so easily fooled. He pointed to the corner of Shen Mo's eye and said, "Your eyes are all red, Uncle."

He asked again, "Why are you crying?"

Shen Mo turned around to look at Ji Ning, asking, "Xiao-Ning, can I hug you for a bit?"

"Sure." Ji Ning stretched out his arms, grinning. "Hug me, Uncle."

And Shen Mo gently hugged Ji Ning in the fading light of the sunset.

A child's temperature was somewhat higher than an adult's. Shen Mo felt especially warm holding the boy in his arms. He rubbed the top of Ji Ning's soft hair and couldn't help but think—this person shared Ji Mingxuan's blood.

Unconsciously, Shen Mo hugged Ji Ning even tighter. He asked, "Xiao-Ning, does your daddy love you?"

Ji Ning didn't seem to understand what love meant. Only after thinking about it for a while did he answer in a loud voice, "Yes!"

Shen Mo smiled. A while later, he asked again, "Then... does Daddy love

Mommy too?"

Ji Ning was confused for a moment before he answered in an even louder voice, "Of course!"

And Shen Mo said, "That's wonderful."

Really. It was wonderful.

Shen Mo took a deep breath before he let go of Ji Ning. Patting Ji Ning's shoulder, he said, "All right. Let's go play in the living room."

Shen Mo put the old phone back under the pillow and left the room with Ji Ning. Not long after they took their seats in the living room, Ji Mingxuan returned.

After the busy day, Ji Mingxuan had taken off his suit jacket and hung it over his arm. He was only wearing a light-colored shirt, which accented the curvature of his waist.

Ji Ning forgot about Shen Mo the moment he saw Ji Mingxuan, pouncing on Ji Mingxuan as he called, "Daddy!"

Ji Mingxuan extended his arms and picked up Ji Ning, asking, "Did you behave yourself today? Did you listen to Uncle?"

Ji Ning said proudly, "Of course."

He turned to Shen Mo for proof. "Isn't that right, Uncle?"

Only then did Ji Mingxuan's gaze land on Shen Mo.

Shen Mo said yes and quietly met Ji Mingxuan's eyes as if they were parted by thousands of seas and mountains.

No, wrong—in reality, they were indeed so far apart.

They had dinner in the hotel's restaurant. With Ji Ning there, they didn't have wine and only ordered a few dishes. With grace, Ji Mingxuan looked after Ji Ning and chatted with Shen Mo at the same time, making no blunder.

Shen Mo didn't talk much to begin with, but he was even quieter today. Only his eyes kept on following Ji Mingxuan.

Ji Mingxuan said, "I wanted to treat you to a restaurant outside, but with Ji Ning here, going anywhere would be inconvenient."

Shen Mo agreed, "That's what having a child is like, isn't it? Parents put children before everything else."

Ji Mingxuan smiled and wiped the corners of Ji Ning's mouth.

Shen Mo watched them gently as if he was watching a beautiful and peaceful dream.

While his soul had already flown elsewhere.

It returned to four years ago, or perhaps even earlier, to that rainy night seven years ago. Gripping the key, he had opened that door in Jinxiu Villa with no hesitation and walked into someone's heart…

At the next table, someone knocked over some cutlery, which fell with a *clink*. Shen Mo shuddered. As though somebody had shattered his dream, he stood up from the table.

With surprise, Ji Mingxuan looked at Shen Mo.

Shen Mo's palm was covered in sweat. He knew he'd lost his composure, so he slowly sat back down and picked up his cup to have some water.

Ji Mingxuan glanced at Shen Mo and said, "Tomorrow..."

Shen Mo interrupted him, "Mr. Ji."

No, no, no—Shen Mo couldn't wait until tomorrow. What if the world fell apart the next second?

# Chapter 10

Turning around with difficulty, Shen Mo gazed at Ji Mingxuan and said, “I have always been yours.”

Ji Mingxuan took a deep breath and immediately embraced Shen Mo tighter. After several thrusts, he released inside of Shen Mo.

Shen Mo shuddered, his body growing more sensitive after the orgasm. His legs were so limp that he couldn’t even stand—he slowly slid down the glass window.

Ji Mingxuan reached to wrap his arms around Shen Mo’s waist, helping Shen Mo get up before bringing Shen Mo to the bathroom. The sex had taken the two too much energy. Once they showered, they fell onto the bed in each others’ arms.

Shen Mo fell asleep the moment he closed his eyes. He was soundly asleep until halfway through the night when he felt a hand on his waist. The hand moved skillfully, stroking his waist in a vague way that aroused a familiar lust in him. Shen Mo murmured, “Mn.” Eyes half closed, he said, “Mr. Ji?”

“It’s nothing.” Ji Mingxuan hugged Shen Mo from behind and said in Shen Mo’s ear, “You can keep sleeping.”

But the hand continued to move, gradually sliding downward.

Shen Mo hurried to grab Ji Mingxuan’s hand. “Mr. Ji, I’m out of strength….”

Ji Mingxuan kissed Shen Mo’s temple and coaxed him, “You don’t need any more strength.”

As Ji Mingxuan spoke, he took off Shen Mo’s pants, searching for the spot where he had taken Shen Mo’s body. Reaching inside, he stirred with two fingers. With their previous lovemaking, Shen Mo had long since been softened, soon getting used to Ji Mingxuan.

So Ji Mingxuan withdrew his fingers. He pressed his body close against Shen Mo’s and entered from the side.

“Ah...”

Shen Mo let out a short cry. He no longer felt like sleeping.

Ji Mingxuan, holding Shen Mo in his arms, slowly moved his body. This time, he did it gently, but he also dragged it on until Shen Mo’s voice grew hoarse. In the end, Shen Mo couldn’t help but beg.

Ji Mingxuan kissed Shen Mo’s nape, asking, “Do you like it?”

“I like it….” Unable to withstand Ji Mingxuan’s teasing, Shen Mo stammered, “Nng… I love you, Mr. Ji….”

These words clearly pleased Ji Mingxuan. He held Shen Mo for a while longer and finally came. This time, the two were too lazy to shower. Their bodies drenched in sweat, they embraced each other, waiting for their breathing to calm down.

The sky outside the window still looked dim. It hadn’t fully brightened yet.

Shen Mo was so exhausted that he no longer felt drowsy. Lying in Ji Mingxuan’s arms, he asked, “You really aren’t married, Mr. Ji?”

Ji Mingxuan chuckled. “You know who’s in my heart.”

Shen Mo smiled wryly. Had he not lost those memories, surely he would’ve understood Ji Mingxuan’s heart. But fate had played a trick on him. He had been so close to losing Ji Mingxuan.

“If that’s the case, Mr. Ji, why did you break up with me four years ago? I asked Mr. Chen to contact you. Why did you never give me a response?”

Ji Mingxuan went silent.

Little by little, the sky grew brighter. A long time passed before Shen Mo finally

heard Ji Mingxuan utter, “An’an…”

Shen Mo’s heart throbbed.

This was the last thing Shen Mo wanted to face. If it weren’t for all those things between him and Zhou Yang, Ji An’an wouldn’t have…

“After An’an woke up in the hospital that day, she listened to me tell her the truth behind everything, but she didn’t shed a single tear. You don’t know this, but she had always cried easily. Ever since she was young, she burst into tears at the smallest matters. But at the time, she was extremely calm. She only asked one thing of me.”

“What was it?”

“Growing up, I tried my best to do whatever An’an wanted. I hated Zhou Yang so much, yet I still let him be my brother-in-law. It was the first time An’an had ever begged me so earnestly. How could I let her down?”

Shen Mo asked again, “What did Miss Ji ask of you?”

Ji Mingxuan closed his eyes before he said, “She asked me to set you free, and let you and Zhou Yang be together.”

Shen Mo’s eyelid twitched. He would never have expected Ji An’an to ask this of Ji Mingxuan.

After all, *she* was the one who had been deceived.

“An’an said that people who loved each other should be together, and the person who wasn’t loved… could only let go.” Ji Mingxuan said, “She was much wiser than me, wasn’t she? I was wrong right from the beginning. I thought that by binding two people together, feelings would occur sooner or later, but who knew the opposite would happen? I exposed your relationship with Zhou Yang, and I hurt you. I had An’an be engaged with Zhou Yang, and I….”

Ji Mingxuan struggled to finish his words.

Shen Mo hurried to hold Ji Mingxuan’s hand. “No. I know you never meant for any of it to happen….”

“But it was too late to make up for what had happened. So I promised An’an to break up with you, to never disturb you and Zhou Yang from then on.”

“Zhou Yang and I have been over for a long time.”

“I didn’t know until I heard you say it that day.” Ji Mingxuan kissed Shen Mo and said, “I kept my promise with An’an, and I haven’t gone back once. I never thought I’d meet you here. That day, at the swimming pool, you just stood there…”

Ji Mingxuan didn’t finish his words, only kissing Shen Mo again and again.

Shen Mo wondered if Ji Mingxuan had really never thought that all this would happen. Why had he invested in this hotel on this island, then? Or perhaps he had held the slightest ray of hope as he waited for Shen Mo on this island.

Just like how he had waited for Shen Mo at Jinxiu Villa.

But Shen Mo didn’t expose Ji Mingxuan.

Ji Mingxuan took Shen Mo’s hand and pressed it against his chest. “Shen Mo, you fell in on your own.”

Shen Mo admitted calmly, “I did.”

It had only been because at the other end of the trap was Mr. Ji that Shen Mo ignored everything else and jumped right in.

Shen Mo knew Ji Mingxuan better now. He realized that there were things Ji Mingxuan would never admit to doing, so Shen Mo had to be the one to show more love.

# Extra Story 1: Memories

It was an ID photo.

The person in the photo still seemed to be a student. Lips slightly pursed, he stared at the camera intently. He looked so serious, even though he was only taking a photo. His features weren't eye-catching, but the pair of eyes under his short bangs were so black that even the red background behind him seemed dull in comparison.

The photo was glued to the investigation files that Ji Mingxuan had just received. Ji Mingxuan went through the files quickly. He found out that the person in the photo was named Shen Mo, that he was an art student at T University, having graduated just this year, and that he was still looking for a job.

Once, Ji Mingxuan had been invited to T University to give a lecture, during which he saw Shen Mo sitting in the first row. Shen Mo had a lost expression on his face, obviously confused by the lecture, but he still took notes attentively.

At that time, Ji Mingxuan only found Shen Mo to be an interesting person. He didn't at all expect Shen Mo to be the person Zhou Yang was dating.

At the end of the files were several other photos taken secretly when Shen Mo and Zhou Yang had been together. Both were men, but one could tell with just one glance at their expressions that they shared an intimate relationship.

Ji Mingxuan raised his hand to press the middle of his brows.

His younger sister, Ji An'an, was childhood friends with Zhou Yang. She'd had feelings for Zhou Yang since she was young. The Zhou family and the Ji family would love to see the two married, but now it seemed that the plan would fail.

At present, the car came to a gradual stop. The driver turned around and said, "Mr. Ji, we have arrived at the Zhou family's house."

Ji Mingxuan nodded and put the files back into the filing envelope. He thought for a while and didn't bring the envelope out with him, only tossing it inside before he got out of the car.

Knowing Ji Mingxuan was coming over today, the Zhou parents were already waiting in the living room. A servant gingerly brought over some tea and left without making a sound.

Ji Mingxuan picked up the teacup and took a sip. It was Iron Goddess oolong, a tea that he liked.

After exchanging greetings, Mrs. Zhou went straight to the subject. "Mingxuan, we agreed a long time ago that An'an and Zhou Yang are going to study abroad together, didn't we? Why are you saying that you'd like to think about it some more, now?"

With deliberation, Ji Mingxuan replied, "I don't think it's the best idea."

"We arranged this marriage between your family and ours so long ago—what's not good about it?"

"You know, An'an's illness…"

Mr. Zhou and Mrs. Zhou exchanged a look. Mrs. Zhou was still the one who spoke up, "We're not strangers, your family and ours. My husband and I have long been aware of An'an's physical condition. But it's nothing to worry about. Back then, your father and your mother married this way as well, didn't they?"

Ji Mingxuan hesitated somewhat.

Ji Mingxuan's parents had always loved each other—a well known love story of

the city. Even though they were also in an arranged marriage, his father loved his sickly mother for his whole life, taking care of her in every possible way. Even after she passed away from her illness, he never remarried.

Mrs. Zhou had also clawed her way through the business world, so she was most adept at observing people's expressions. She seized this opportunity. "In fact, with An'an's situation, it'd be the best if she could marry Zhou Yang. At least our families know each other well. You'll be able to rest assured too, won't you?"

Besides, the two families shared the same interests. Such a bond was far firmer than so-called love.

Mrs. Zhou didn't say it out loud, but all three who were present understood.

Ji Mingxuan hesitated indeed, but she didn't convince him yet. He only said, "Even if An'an is fine with it, Zhou Yang might not be willing."

"Mingxuan, what do you mean by this?"

"From what I know, Zhou Yang is already involved in a relationship with someone."

Mrs. Zhou's expression changed slightly.

Mr. Zhou laughed instead. "Men, huh? Normally, they date a few girls before they marry. Those relationships are nothing serious."

Mrs. Zhou had an unpleasant expression on her face, but she also agreed, "Zhou Yang dated one or two girls in high school too, but they broke up long ago. I haven't heard anything about the one now."

*Zhou Yang is dating a man for a change—of course he wouldn't dare let his parents know.*

Sensibly, Ji Mingxuan did not say it out loud.

Mrs. Zhou stared at Ji Mingxuan as she said, "So it seems, Mingxuan, that you've already had someone investigate Zhou Yang."

"I put my sister's happiness first, of course." Ji Mingxuan smiled. "In any case, on the matter of studying abroad, perhaps it's best that you ask Zhou Yang for his opinion before making the decision."

And then Ji Mingxuan changed the subject. He chatted with them for a while longer, showing them adequate courtesy before he left.

Ji Mingxuan didn't let Ji An'an know about this conversation. He only wanted his dearest sister to dress beautifully and remain the princess inside the castle. As for the storms outside, there was no need for her to worry about them.

Ji Mingxuan didn't expect that, a few days later, Ji An'an would bring up the matter of studying abroad on her own.

Concealing his surprise, Ji Mingxuan smiled and asked, "Who brought it up to you?"

"Zhou Yang did. Brother, he said his parents have already discussed it with you. Isn't that the case?"

Ji Mingxuan's eyes darkened. He asked, "Zhou Yang has also agreed to study abroad?"

"Of course. Why else would he mention it?" Ji An'an shook Ji Mingxuan's arm, her voice saccharine. "Brother, are you going to let me go or not?"

Ji Mingxuan did not reply. He thought rapidly, but he revealed nothing on the surface, only patting Ji An'an's hand. "Do you really like Zhou Yang so much, An'an?"

"Brother!" Ji An'an stamped her feet, her face blushing slightly. "I've liked him

since I was young. It's not like you don't know."

"Why do you like him?"

"He… He's been my childhood dream."

Just like how Snow White looked forward to meeting Prince Charming, perhaps every girl had such a dream.

Ji Mingxuan gazed at his sister gently, asking, "What if Zhou Yang doesn't like you back?"

Ji An'an smiled sweetly. Not at all offended by the presumption, she only said, "Then I'll still like him. I always will."

She had inherited her mother's illness, but she was more like her father in character, particularly persistent when it came to affection. After the siblings' mother had died, their father missed their mother so much that he fell ill and passed away soon after.

This problem seemed to run in the Ji family.

Of course, Ji Mingxuan wouldn't act on emotions alone. Weighing the pros and cons, he thought that if Zhou Yang really hadn't been serious about those past relationships and would treat An'an well in the future, with the Ji family's financial resources as backing, the marriage was not completely out of the question.

"Brother," Ji An'an was still asking, "are you going to let me go or not?"

"Don't worry." Seeing the anticipation on her face, Ji Mingxuan smiled. "Your wish will come true."

All he had was this sister of his. Whatever Ji An'an wanted, he would certainly present it to her.

The procedures for studying abroad were soon completed. Half a month later, Ji Mingxuan saw Ji An'an off at the airport. Of course, Zhou Yang left together with her. Ji Mingxuan wasn't too fond of Zhou Yang, so he only nodded as a greeting.

Ji Mingxuan drove back alone. On the radio, someone was singing an old love song in a hoarse voice. Ji Mingxuan felt somewhat melancholy. As he waited at a red light, for some reason, he remembered a pair of dark eyes.

Those eyes looked clear and black. No matter what they gazed at—a person or a camera—they held an earnestness within.

What was his name again?

Right, Shen Mo.

Ji Mingxuan thought that the name suited him well. Now that Zhou Yang was going abroad with An'an, Zhou Yang might have already broken up with Shen Mo. Before the red light turned green, Ji Mingxuan took the files from the back seat and looked over them again.

When he saw the photo of the student-like young man again, Ji Mingxuan suddenly felt a flicker of something. He pulled out his phone and made a call.

"It's me. Yes, keep an eye on the person I told you to investigate last month... It's nothing serious. Just keep it up for a few days..."

After hanging up, Ji Mingxuan drove home.

By the time he got the call from the other side, he was already in his study. He received unexpected news—Shen Mo was missing.

"When did it happen? That's right—what else are we going to do? Look for him, of course." Ji Mingxuan decided at once. "Send some people to look for him."

He hung up and circled his study twice. He already had speculation in mind.

Zhou Yang had just gone abroad with Ji An'an, and right after that, Shen Mo had

gone missing. Who else could have done it? Ji Mingxuan didn't expect Mrs. Zhou to be so ruthless not only in business matters but also in dealing with her son's past affairs.

But all this had nothing to do with Ji Mingxuan. All that he had done was mention the existence of such a person to the Zhou family. Zhou Yang should have been the one to decide whether or not to break up with Shen Mo.

But if he hadn't hired someone to investigate Shen Mo…

Ji Mingxuan sat down slowly and read the files in his hands over and over again. Finally, he reached out and peeled off the photo.

He didn't hear about Shen Mo until the next day.

Ji Mingxuan made time for this matter and traveled to quite a remote location by car. The car jolted violently on the way, while barrenness filled the landscape outside. After a long while, an old, abandoned warehouse came into his view.

He got out of the car, walking inexplicably faster than everyone else. As he was about to open the warehouse door, somebody stopped him. "Mr. Ji, things might not be too good inside."

Ji Mingxuan felt a sudden pulse at his temple. He said calmly, "That's fine."

Then, he pulled the door open.

A musty smell rushed into his nose. It was quite dark in the warehouse, and only with light from outside could he see a person curled up on the ground. He was covered in wounds—his right hand was especially heavily injured, battered and bloody. A jarring redness pooled beneath his palm.

Ji Mingxuan almost thought that he was dead. Step by step, he walked over. The person on the ground moved a little, peeling his eyes open to look at Ji Mingxuan.

Ji Mingxuan walked closer and closer, and little by little, his reflection appeared in the pair of quiet, black eyes.

Ji Mingxuan had always hated hospitals.

His sickly mother had passed away soon after giving birth to his sister. Moreover, his only sister Ji An'an had inherited his mother's heart disease; she had spent most of her time in the hospital ever since her childhood. Ji Mingxuan was so used to going in and out of hospitals that he felt disgusted whenever he smelled the familiar scent of disinfectant.

But now he was sitting in a hospital room, waiting for someone to wake up.

Ji Mingxuan had still gotten there too late. When he arrived at the abandoned warehouse, Shen Mo was already in bad shape. Shen Mo's whole body, especially his right hand, was covered in wounds. His life was not in danger, but the doctor said that there might be lasting damage. Ji Mingxuan remembered that Shen Mo had studied art and that even the jobs he was looking for were all related to painting. But his hand... might not be able to hold the paintbrush ever again.

Ji Mingxuan let out a light sigh.

He had only met Shen Mo once, and Shen Mo's abduction had nothing to do with him either. After he'd heard the news, he immediately rushed over to rescue Shen Mo and even brought Shen Mo to the hospital afterward—he had done more than enough. There was no need for him to stay here and waste his time.

But…

Ji Mingxuan remembered how, when he had walked into the old warehouse, those black, earnest eyes had reflected his figure. He kneaded his brows, thinking

he might as well wait until Shen Mo woke up.

Sometime later, the person on the bed let out a murmur. His long eyelashes trembled slightly.

Ji Mingxuan's heart also wavered. Right at this moment, his phone rang, and he had to go out and answer the phone. When he entered the room again, he found that Shen Mo was already awake.

"You're awake." Ji Mingxuan gazed at Shen Mo for a while. With no delicacy, he went straight to the point. "The doctor said that you're already out of danger. The injury on your right hand is the most serious. There may be long-term effects."

Shen Mo's face looked even paler than it had looked while he was unconscious. His lips moved a little, but what he cared about was not his own hand. Instead, he uttered two syllables, "Zhou Yang..."

Ji Mingxuan had known that Shen Mo would definitely ask about Zhou Yang. He replied coldly, "Zhou Yang is abroad. He's with my sister."

Ji Mingxuan paused before he added, "My sister is Ji An'an."

Sure enough, Shen Mo had heard of the name before. He looked up at Ji Mingxuan, his eyes purely black yet lacking in vitality, almost as though nothing could be seen reflected inside.

Ji Mingxuan suddenly regretted staying here. He reached up to fix his tie, and only then did he introduce himself, "My name is Ji Mingxuan."

After that, Ji Mingxuan went to the hospital one more time to see Shen Mo. Shen Mo borrowed Ji Mingxuan's phone and, right in front of Ji Mingxuan, called Zhou Yang to break up with him. When Shen Mo had been beaten up and tortured, Shen Mo had kept his mouth shut, but now that he was out of danger, he instead chose to break up with Zhou Yang. He said he couldn't have his family be in danger.

Of course, all this had nothing to do with Ji Mingxuan. Later, Ji Mingxuan sent his assistant to visit Shen Mo several times, but he himself never went to the hospital again. A month later, Shen Mo recovered and left the hospital. Ji Mingxuan was so busy with work every day that he almost forgot about Shen Mo. However, after being passed around by many people, a watch reached Ji Mingxuan's hands. His subordinates had found it in the old warehouse. He knew it probably belonged to Shen Mo.

It was easy to return the watch to its owner. Ji Mingxuan had Shen Mo's address on file, so he could just ask his assistant to pay a visit there. It had just rained that day. Once the sky cleared, the weather was especially pleasant. Some sunlight seeped through the window and fell on Ji Mingxuan's slender fingers. Sitting in the back seat of the car, he watched the driver weave through the city's bustling streets before finally arriving at an old neighborhood. The apartment buildings there were more than a decade old, their walls overspread with ivy. Ji Mingxuan's gaze swept across the windows as he wondered where Shen Mo lived.

The car stopped. Just as his assistant was getting out of the car, Ji Mingxuan said, "Wait."

"Mr. Ji?"

Ji Mingxuan slowly drew back his gaze. Tapping his finger against his knee, he said, "Actually, I'll go."

Ji Mingxuan opened the car door and took the watch from his assistant's hand. He walked up the stairs to the third floor, then knocked on one of the doors.

# Extra Story 2: Secrets

There was an ID photo in the wallet.

The person in the photo still seemed to be a student. His bangs were extremely short, revealing his smooth forehead and bright eyes. With his lips slightly pursed, he looked somewhat serious.

Shen Mo recalled that the photo had been taken when he was in college so that he could stick it onto his resume. He didn't know how Ji Mingxuan had gotten hold of it, but Ji Mingxuan kept it in his wallet every day. No matter how Shen Mo looked at it, he felt that it wasn't a good photo, but just as he was about to take it out of the wallet, he heard a sound from the bed.

He hurriedly stuffed the wallet into Ji Mingxuan's coat again and slipped back into bed.

Ji Mingxuan flipped over and wrapped an arm around Shen Mo's waist. His eyes still closed, Ji Mingxuan only rubbed his chin against Shen Mo's neck, asking, "Where did you go?"

The rubbing tickled Shen Mo, so he dodged a bit to the side. "I went to the bathroom."

*And took a look at your wallet on my way.*

Of course, Shen Mo didn't say the second part out loud.

Holding Shen Mo in his arms, Ji Mingxuan said, "I'm taking a day off today. Let's sleep a little longer."

Shen Mo had realized that Ji Mingxuan especially enjoyed hugging him in bed like this, refusing to get up even if they were awake. But those who had become fathers no longer had holidays. Shen Mo reminded him, "Xiao-Ning will be getting up soon."

Ji Mingxuan let out a muffled response and immediately opened his eyes. He looked at Shen Mo for a few moments before he took Shen Mo's chin and kissed him hard. Only once he'd had enough did he let go of Shen Mo and get up to dress himself.

Shen Mo was somewhat out of breath from the kiss. He lay in bed for a while longer before he heard Ji Ning knocking outside the door.

Ji Ning first called, "Daddy!"

And then called, "Uncle!"

He rapped loudly on the door as if he wouldn't stop until the door opened.

Now that Ji Mingxuan had finished washing, he already looked quite refreshed. He walked over to open the door and picked Ji Ning up. "Come, let's have breakfast."

Ji Ning waved his little arms, asking, "What about Uncle?"

Shen Mo heard Ji Mingxuan answer, "Uncle was very tired last night. Be a good boy and don't bother him."

*Why did you do it so many times if you knew I was tired?*

Wrapped in the blanket, Shen Mo didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He was the kind of person who couldn't stand leisure—he didn't like lying around, even on his days off. So he soon got up, thinking about taking advantage of the sunny day to clean the windows and whatnot.

But right after lunch, Ji Mingxuan gave Shen Mo a task: to go buy a pair of cufflinks with him.

# Extra Story 3: Happy New Year

There was a ring on the table.

It was a silver-white ring of the most common style, with neither diamonds nor engravings on it. Ji Mingxuan had told his secretary to buy one for the time being and bring it over.

Shen Mo was debating whether or not he should put it on.

He'd performed terribly in bed last night, so nervous that he had almost seemed like a dead fish. After they finished, Mr. Ji left the room without saying a word, probably quite dissatisfied with him. Well, it wasn't *his* fault—he'd dated Zhou Yang before, but Zhou Yang, who had only had girlfriends in the past, hadn't had much experience with men, and it was probably difficult for him to overcome the hurdle. Shen Mo didn't want to force it either, so he thought he might as well let things happen naturally. Yet, in the end…

In the end, Shen Mo broke up with Zhou Yang and spent over half of the year in a trance. He was almost living on the street when Ji Mingxuan found him and brought him back.

Perhaps the breakup had been too much of a shock, but Shen Mo's memory of these past six months was rather vague. However, he could remember that Ji Mingxuan had saved him when he had been abducted, and Mr. Ji had even paid for his medical bills later on. Ji Mingxuan wanted to ensure his sister's happiness by pretending to be together with him, so of course he was willing to cooperate.

But Shen Mo hadn't expected to be stumped by the matter of having sex, before anything else. He'd signed the contract after all, so he thought he should be a bit more dedicated. Did he need to watch some gay porn and learn from it?

As Shen Mo's thoughts wandered, Ji Mingxuan came back from work. Seeing Shen Mo in a daze, he asked, "What are you thinking about?"

Of course, Shen Mo couldn't say that he was wondering where to download porn, so he could only say, "It's nothing…."

Ji Mingxuan glanced at the ring on the table. "Why aren't you wearing it?"

Shen Mo asked blankly, "I'm really supposed to wear it?"

Ji Mingxuan didn't reply and only reached out to grab Shen Mo's left hand. Shen Mo finally noticed now that Ji Mingxuan was already wearing a ring on his left ring finger. The ring was silver-white as well and looked the same as Shen Mo's—these were couples' rings. With his slender fingers, Ji Mingxuan held the ring and moved it toward Shen Mo's finger.

Out of reflex, Shen Mo tried to retract his hand.

Ji Mingxuan held Shen Mo's hand firmly. His gaze brushed casually over Shen Mo's face as he slid the silver-white band onto Shen Mo's finger.

Shen Mo felt somewhat surprised. He thought, *It's just an act—do we need to be so serious?*

As if he knew what Shen Mo was thinking, Ji Mingxuan looked down at their connected hands. "We should put on the full act."

For three whole years after this, the two wore the same rings, never taking them off once.

"What are you thinking about?"

Ji Mingxuan's voice suddenly sounded beside Shen Mo's ear.

# Extra Story 4: Present

On Valentine's Day, Shen Mo received a rose as a present.

It was a red rose, not yet fully in bloom, with morning dewdrops still on its petals —someone had quietly put it beside his pillow. Waking up in the morning, he had seen the rose the moment he'd opened his eyes. He wasn't too interested in plants' reproductive organs, but he couldn't help but look over and over at the present he'd received on such a special day.

The sun outside the window was rising higher in the sky. It wasn't until Ji Ning called "Uncle" loudly from outside Shen Mo's door that Shen Mo got up to wash himself. It was the weekend, so Shen Mo had gotten up a little later than usual. Ji Mingxuan and Ji Ning were already fully dressed, waiting for him at the breakfast table. After the three of them finished breakfast, Shen Mo found a vase and put the rose inside it, while Ji Mingxuan watched Ji Ning draw in the study. When Ji Ning had returned to China, he'd happened to be old enough to go to kindergarten here. Perhaps he had been affected by Shen Mo, but he was especially interested in art. Shen Mo was quite happy of course, and bought him a variety of tools.

There was no kindergarten today. Ji Ning had been making a fuss about wanting to draw since early in the morning. After finishing up other matters, Shen Mo went to the study as well, and saw that Ji Ning was drawing a giraffe—they had gone to the zoo last week and seen giraffes. It was quite a good drawing, in fact. Shen Mo gave Ji Ning some advice on the side, then took out his phone to take a photo.

Next, Shen Mo posted it directly to his WeChat Moments*.

*Translator's Note: A popular social media platform in China.

He'd never used these features in the past, but he'd recently hired a new girl for his studio. She was Yang Yue's age, and the two hit it off immediately. They were always posting landscapes, food pictures, and couple photos to their Moments, and they'd even urged Shen Mo to join them.

At first, Shen Mo was only doing what they wanted, but as time went on, he gradually became addicted. Ji Ning was just too cute—like every silly parent, Shen Mo would show off his baby every day if he could.

Soon after Shen Mo posted the photo, Ji Mingxuan also took out his phone and looked at it. After that, he became somewhat distracted, looking down at his phone again and again.

Seeing this, Shen Mo said, "Are you busy with work, Mr. Ji? Don't worry, you can go to work. I can stay with Xiao-Ning."

Ji Mingxuan replied with a long face, "No."

His tone definitely sounded unpleasant.

Shen Mo was surprised, not knowing what had upset Ji Mingxuan. He'd been together with Ji Mingxuan for so long already, but he still couldn't figure Ji Mingxuan out. Was it because last night he'd said he was too tired and refused to do it a second time?

Shen Mo's face felt somewhat warm. Ji Ning was here though, so Shen Mo couldn't ask Ji Mingxuan directly. A while later, Ji Mingxuan finally lost his patience. He stood up and left the study.

Shen Mo thought that Ji Mingxuan had gone to work, but Ji Mingxuan returned quickly, holding in his hand the rose that Shen Mo had just put inside the vase.

Ji Ning looked up and exclaimed, "Flower!"

# Extra Story 5: Birthday

Shen Mo was drunk.

It was the fourth of February: the beginning of Spring, as well as Ji Mingxuan's birthday. They had reunited with each other on S Island, so for Shen Mo's birthday this year, Ji Mingxuan had planned a vacation in advance and revisited the island with Shen Mo. This time, they lived in a villa with a sea view and a private swimming pool. Sunshine, the beach, the coast, and a candlelit dinner… Nothing could be more perfect. The only thing that surprised Ji Mingxuan was Shen Mo's alcohol tolerance—Shen Mo was drunk after just two glasses of red wine.

When Shen Mo got drunk, he never yelled or cried, but instead he talked ten times more than usual. Holding Ji Mingxuan's hand, he rambled on and on.

The beautiful night that Ji Mingxuan had imagined vanished right there. He didn't want to interrupt Shen Mo, though, so he could only be patient and listen to him. Shen Mo talked about everything—from fighting with his elementary school classmate to the math teacher he'd hated in high school. As he went on, he even asked Ji Mingxuan for his opinion: "Isn't that right?" "Don't you agree?" "Do I make sense?"

Ji Mingxuan could only nod again and again: "That's right." "I agree." "Everything you say makes sense."

Shen Mo seemed to be very satisfied with Ji Mingxuan's answers. With his eyes half-closed, he gazed at Ji Mingxuan.

Shen Mo seldom looked at someone so boldly. Under the gaze, Ji Mingxuan even felt his body grow warm. He grabbed Shen Mo's hand. "What are you looking at?"

Shen Mo didn't reply. Suddenly, he smiled and called, "Ji Mingxuan."

It was rare to hear Shen Mo call his name. Ji Mingxuan answered, "Yes, it's me."

"You…" In a drunken haze, Shen Mo asked, "You're hiding something from me, aren't you?"

Ji Mingxuan had nothing to feel guilty about. His face didn't blush and his heart didn't skip a single beat as he said, "No, I'm not."

"Liar!" Shen Mo, drunk as he was, slowly leaned on Ji Mingxuan's shoulder, murmuring, "I know about it… The pair of rings..."

Rings?

Had he found out about those?

Ji Mingxuan, remembering the rings he'd hidden somewhere in their house, felt his heart rate speed up. But he heard Shen Mo add, "And those flowers…."

Flowers?

He'd even found out about those?

Ji Mingxuan knew he must keep his cool, so he immediately calmed himself. Patiently, he tried to get an answer out of Shen Mo. "Where did you see the rings?"

Shen Mo frowned as if he was trying his best to recall the memory.

Afraid that Shen Mo wouldn't be able to remember it, Ji Mingxuan coaxed, "That's it. Think about it carefully."

But, even after thinking for a long time, Shen Mo only shouted, "I want to swim!"

Then, Shen Mo left Ji Mingxuan alone and went to the villa's private swimming pool.

Ji Mingxuan felt rather speechless. Drunkards were like this, after all, messing

with other people's feelings with no knowledge of doing so. Seeing Shen Mo wobble as he walked, Ji Mingxuan worried if it was safe for Shen Mo to swim like this, so he hurried after him.

Without even taking off his clothes, Shen Mo jumped into the swimming pool. Ji Mingxuan could only get in the water like this as well, watching him fool around from the side. Shen Mo splashed about, but all of a sudden, he plunged into the water. Alarmed, Ji Mingxuan called his name and rushed over reaching for him. However, Shen Mo quickly floated back to the surface, splashing water onto Ji Mingxuan's body—he was almost as childish as Ji Ning was.

Ji Mingxuan really couldn't stand it any longer. With a swing of his arm, he pulled Shen Mo to his chest and seized him firmly. At first, Shen Mo still tried to struggle, but gradually he quieted.

The swimming pool was open-air. Right now, the moonlight shined on the two of them.

Shen Mo's gaze, like the hazy moonlight, brushed over Ji Mingxuan's face.

Gripping Shen Mo's wrists, Ji Mingxuan asked again, "What are you looking at?"

Shen Mo replied, "Ji Mingxuan."

Only then did Ji Mingxuan understand that this was the answer.

Ji Mingxuan couldn't help but draw closer to Shen Mo, asking in his ear, "What's there to look at?"

As if he felt tickled, Shen Mo dodged and giggled. "Every part of you looks good."

In case Ji Mingxuan didn't believe him, perhaps, he leaned right in and kissed Ji Mingxuan's eye. "Here."

And then Ji Mingxuan's nose. "Here."

The final kiss fell on Ji Mingxuan's lips. "And here… Mn."

Before Shen Mo could finish his words, Ji Mingxuan was already kissing him aggressively.

Both of their clothes were wet. After the kiss, their bodies clung tight to each other's, inevitably rousing a certain heat. With Shen Mo in his arms, Ji Mingxuan swam to the side of the pool and pressed Shen Mo against the pool wall.

Shen Mo didn't resist at all. He only looked up at Ji Mingxuan, his eyes somewhat watery from the drunkenness, filled with bold affection.

Ji Mingxuan kissed Shen Mo again.

The kiss lingered this time. The water in the pool rippled slowly along with their movements, lapping against their bodies.

Shen Mo was soon turned on. He hung onto Ji Mingxuan's shoulders with his hands, refusing to let go.

The clothes stuck to their bodies were not easy to strip, so Ji Mingxuan only took off Shen Mo's pants. He brought one hand between Shen Mo's thighs and rubbed his entrance, reaching one finger inside.

"Mmm…"

With the motion, cool water seeped into Shen Mo's body. He couldn't help but let out a moan.

Ji Mingxuan licked Shen Mo's neck. "Don't be afraid. It'll be all right soon."

As Ji Mingxuan spoke, he added another finger, spreading the entrance wider. With several stirs, Shen Mo gradually grew softer and wetter inside.

# Extra Story 6: Ambitions

The first time Liang Yunsheng met Zhao Yi was when Liang Yusheng was invited to attend a singing competition as a guest.

It had been three years since the devastating car accident. After rehabilitation, Liang Yunsheng was already able to walk on his right leg with the help of a cane. A friend of his had invested in the competition and wanted him to make an appearance. He owed his friend a favor, so he could only show up and go through the motions.

One of the contestants was Zhao Yi. The contestants were all young and lively, some with especially good looks and others with especially unique voices—Zhao Yi definitely didn't stand out. Despite his handsome looks, his singing was no more than mediocre. Liang Yunsheng only heard him sing once, but he knew Zhao Yi had no talent for singing.

And yet, Zhao Yi still made an impression on Liang Yunsheng.

All of the contestants were young adults who had just plunged into the industry; most of them still had innocence in their eyes. Zhao Yi was different. He was still so young, but he already seemed so experienced. He stood on stage generously, showing a certain ambition in his eyes.

Once, as Liang Yunsheng was walking out of the lounge backstage, he saw Zhao Yi standing right at the door. Smiling, Zhao Yi said, "Mr. Liang, I'm a fan of yours."

Liang Yunsheng nodded with courtesy.

He had heard these words too many times. Three years ago, when his name had been at its peak, thousands of people said the same words to him every day. But the car accident took everything away.

Zhao Yi added, "I love your songs, Mr. Liang."

Liang Yunsheng thanked him politely.

"Do you think I can win this competition, Mr. Liang?"

Liang Yunsheng couldn't help but smile. It was good to be young—so reckless, and even speaking so directly.

So Liang Yunsheng also gave him a direct reply, "You're not good at singing."

"I know." Zhao Yi's tone was brisk. He didn't seem upset at all. "But I want to sing one of your songs, Mr. Liang."

"That's a pity." Liang Yunsheng said, "I don't write songs anymore."

When he finished his words, he walked around Zhao Yi, his cane knocking dully on the ground, and he left.

In the final round, Zhao Yi did sing a song by Liang Yunsheng. It was an old song from ten years ago, one that Liang Yunsheng had written when he was about Zhao Yi's age.

Zhao Yi didn't have a good voice, and his singing wasn't adequately emotional either. The results of the contest were just as Liang Yunsheng had predicted—Zhao Yi didn't even make the top five. The contest was broadcast live on TV, but there was fierce competition between similar programs. And so, despite the initial advertising, only the winner of the contest made a bit of a splash, whereas the others all faded into obscurity.

Two months after the contest, Liang Yunsheng's friend came to visit him, asking him to write a song for someone.

# Extra Story 7: The Past

"Shen Mo! Shen Mo!"

A-Wen, Shen Mo's roommate, stood beside the bunk bed and called Shen Mo's name again and again.

Shen Mo poked his head out of the blanket, glancing at the time on his phone. It was only half past nine.

"I have no class all day today. Why are you waking me up so early?"

Beneath him, A-Wen laughed sheepishly. "I know you don't have class today. That's why I wanted to ask you for a favor."

Shen Mo sat up, his short hair disheveled. He asked, "What is it?"

"Our department will be holding a lecture right this afternoon. Could you attend it for me?"

"Hey, you study economics and I study art. Do you think I can attend it for you?"

"Just show up and take some notes for me. It'll be really easy. Do you know who's invited for the lecture? A young entrepreneur, a successful man who shows up many times on finance magazines—my idol."

"Then why aren't you going on your own?"

"I'd definitely go if I could, but I have a test, right?" A-Wen put his hands together, pleading cheekily, "Shen Mo, please, please. I'll treat you to a big meal tonight."

Shen Mo was good-tempered, a nice guy acknowledged by everyone. He'd always found it difficult to turn down others' requests, and this time was no different. He rubbed his hair and sighed. "Alright. Send me the time and place."

A-Wen cheered. After thanking Shen Mo, he hurried off to study for the test.

Now that Shen Mo had been woken up anyway, he didn't go back to sleep. He got out of bed and went to the bathroom. After he washed himself and came out, there were already two new messages on his phone. One was the time and place of the afternoon lecture; the other was from Zhou Yang, inviting him to have lunch together.

Zhou Yang had been Shen Mo's high school classmate. The two had the same interests and both loved painting. But whereas Shen Mo studied art in university, Zhou Yang studied financial management under the pressure of his family. Even so, they were still close friends who talked about just anything, and they'd agreed on going abroad to study art after they graduated.

Zhou Yang had gone home last week. They hadn't seen each other in several days by now, so the two of them went to a small restaurant off campus and ordered a few dishes.

Zhou Yang said as he ate, "You don't have class this afternoon, do you? Let's go watch a movie together?"

"I can't, this afternoon. I promised A-Wen from our dorm to attend a lecture for him."

"Why does he always ask you to help him? You're too soft-hearted."

"We're roommates after all. We should help each other."

Zhou Yang could only shake his head.

Shen Mo asked, "What about you? Have you decided yet?"

"Decided what?"

"To study abroad with me, of course. You didn't forget about it, did you?"

# Extra Story 8: Old Story

It was at the supermarket that Shen Mo received Zhou Yang's call. At the time, he was thinking about whether to make steak or pork rib soup for dinner. The moment the call came through, Zhou Yang said immediately, "I won't be back for dinner tonight."

"What happened? Didn't you say you weren't working overtime today?"

"Yeah…" Zhou Yang seemed somewhat hesitant. "Something came up at home. I have to go back."

"Go back? Are your parents not feeling well?"

"Something like that," Zhou Yang answered vaguely. "I'll probably have to stay there for a few days."

"Okay, I understand. Then take care of yourself too."

"Okay."

Hanging up, Shen Mo looked at the steak he had put in the shopping cart, and could only take it back out. He was alone, so of course he wouldn't be in the mood to cook a big meal. He could make do with some instant noodles.

After Shen Mo and Zhou Yang had graduated from university, their plans to study abroad were laid aside due to disapproval from Zhou Yang's family. But they didn't give up completely—they rented a house and lived together as they slowly saved up money.

Shen Mo recently found a job related to painting, with which he was quite satisfied. Their rental was close to the company too. It was a little small, but Shen Mo enjoyed cleaning, so he kept it quite tidy.

Shen Mo had nothing to do in the evening; he went to bed after watching TV for a while. Before he slept, he sent a text message saying good night to Zhou Yang.

It was Saturday the next day, and Shen Mo stayed home. Seeing how good the weather was, he busied himself with some chores, spending all day doing the laundry and so on. In the evening, Shen Mo called Zhou Yang, but Zhou Yang didn't answer.

Shen Mo didn't take it to heart and went to the nearby supermarket as usual. When he finished and came out, the sky had already darkened, but the street lamps were not on yet. Everything around him was shrouded in the dim dusk of the night. As he turned a corner, he vaguely felt as if something was not quite right. He spun around—the alley was empty, except for a car that followed not far behind him.

Shen Mo ignored it and continued to walk forward. Yet, just a few steps later, the car caught up to him. With headlights bright as snow, it braked hard at his side. Next, someone leaped from the car and lunged for him.

Shen Mo had never been in such a situation before; he was frozen with shock. When his attention returned, his mouth was already covered by a pair of rough hands.

"Mmph… Mmmph…"

Shen Mo struggled to escape, his groceries scattering all over the ground. But another man jumped out of the car and quickly shoved him inside.

The car door slammed shut.

Shen Mo's hands were tied up behind his back. His head was spinning. A while later, a word finally emerged in his mind—*abduction*.

But Shen Mo was just a poor student. What was the use of abducting *him*?

# Extra Story 9: After Rains

In those two weeks, it had always been raining.

The rain poured down from the sky, as if it would never end.

Ji Mingxuan came home from work. Just as he entered the house, he heard the sound of someone crying. Following it, he walked into the child room to see the new nanny, Chen-jie, gently comforting the baby in her arms.

Chen-jie was a professional who had more than ten years of experience taking care of children. But, facing the crying baby in her arms, she still seemed to be somewhat at a loss. Looking up, she said, "Mr. Ji…."

Ji Mingxuan stepped forward. Upon seeing the baby's face, flushed red from the crying, he took a step back before he asked, "What's wrong with him?"

"He just finished his milk. He's crying because he wants to sleep."

"Why is he crying so hard?"

"Children feel insecure easily. After all, his mother… uh…" Chen-jie uttered what was on her mind. Only after she spoke did she realize her words hadn't been the most appropriate. She revealed a remorseful expression.

Ji Mingxuan didn't take it to heart. He nodded and waved his hand. It was raining heavily outside. His gaze, swaying, drifted toward the window.

Half a month ago, Ji An'an, Ji Mingxuan's dearest sister, had left him.

She left him forever.

Ji An'an had a congenital heart defect. Ji Mingxuan had always known that he would lose her someday, but when the day really came, he still felt caught off guard. Ji An'an had been kind and gentle since she was young. Even as she lay on the hospital bed, her breath thin, she still tried to smile.

"Don't cry, Brother. "

"I don't regret it at all. "

"Take care of Ji Ning for me, Brother."

Ji Ning was the baby who was crying right now. Ji An'an had suffered unimaginably giving birth to him. She had named the child "Ji Ning*," hoping he could grow up safe and healthy.

*Translator's Note: The character *ning(□)* can be found in the word *anning*□□ □□, which means "peaceful."

Thinking this, Ji Mingxuan finally walked forward and told Chen-jie, "Let me hold him."

Chen-jie felt somewhat surprised. "Mr. Ji?"

Ji Mingxuan laughed at himself. "From now on, all we have is each other. I'll have to learn how to hold him, sooner or later."

So Chen-jie stuffed Ji Ning into Ji Mingxuan's arms.

Ji Mingxuan took Ji Ning over carefully—he found that the baby was incredibly soft. Afraid that he might hurt Ji Ning, he couldn't help but tense up his limbs, not knowing where to place them.

Chen-jie chuckled and helped Ji Mingxuan adjust his posture.

Only then was Ji Mingxuan able to steady his hold on Ji Ning's small body. Clumsily, he tried to get Ji Ning to fall asleep.

Of course, the baby showed Mr. Ji no respect as he continued to bawl.

"Don't cry." Ji Mingxuan lowered his head and kissed the small, crumpled face. "I know why you're crying. You know, I also miss her very much."

# Extra Story 10: New Year's Eve

The busiest time of the year was always Chunyun*. Ji Mingxuan, Shen Mo, and Ji Ning, one family of three, were currently sitting on a train during the Chunyun season.

*Translator's Note: Chunyun is a period of travel around the Lunar New Year, when people go back to their hometowns to gather with their families.

Ji Ning had just started kindergarten—children this age were the most energetic. He usually traveled by plane or car, but this was his first time going on a train. Everything he saw seemed novel to him. Unable to sit still in his seat, he kept on trying to squeeze into the crowd, wanting to explore the other compartments.

Afraid of him getting lost, Shen Mo had to follow closely behind him. Even on the winter day, sweat formed over Shen Mo's body.

In the end, it was Ji Mingxuan who said, "Ji Ning, come back."

Ji Ning could only come back reluctantly.

Ji Mingxuan patted the seat next to him. "Sit here."

Ji Ning jumped onto the seat and obediently put his legs together, resting his hands on his knees.

Ji Mingxuan gave Ji Ning's head a rub. "Good boy. Take a look at the view out of the window."

Outside, scenes of Southern China's creek towns were flying past. Apart from the expansive paddy fields, one or two dainty Western-style houses could also be seen at times.

But Ji Ning couldn't sit still. After looking out for just a short while, he began to wriggle in his seat again. Turning around, he asked, "Daddy, how much longer until we get there?"

Ji Mingxuan glanced at his watch and replied, "About half an hour."

"Yay!" Ji Ning cheered.

However, Shen Mo had a completely different expression. He mumbled, "So soon?"

Somewhat amused, Ji Mingxuan gazed at Shen Mo and asked, "What's wrong? Feeling a little nervous?"

"... No."

Despite what he said, Shen Mo unconsciously tapped his finger on the table.

The destination of their trip was Shen Mo's hometown—a scenic town in Southern China.

Back then, because of Zhou Yang, Shen Mo had fallen out with his family and hadn't gone home in years. Only after he began to raise Ji Ning together with Ji Mingxuan did he really come to understand the difficulties of raising a child, and he had been trying to mend his relationship with his parents. Unfortunately, though, he hadn't made much progress.

Once Ji Mingxuan found out about this, he bought train tickets to Shen Mo's hometown without telling Shen Mo. It wasn't until New Year's Eve that he dragged Shen Mo onto the train. Shen Mo hadn't prepared anything—even his luggage had been packed last minute—so of course he was nervous now.

"What are you worried about? That your parents might kick you out?"

"It's definitely possible."

"If worse comes to worst, we can book a hotel. No matter what, we won't be out

on the street."

Shen Mo forced a smile.

Ji Mingxuan reassured him, "Don't worry. I made sure to bring the secret weapon this time."

"What secret weapon?"

Ji Mingxuan pointed at Ji Ning, sitting next to him.

With a pair of wide, innocent eyes, Ji Ning smiled sweetly.

Shen Mo asked, perplexed, "Xiao-Ning?"

Ji Mingxuan nodded and turned to Ji Ning. "Do you remember what Daddy taught you?"

"Yes!"

"What do you call Uncle's parents?"

"Grandpa and Grandma."

"What else do you do?"

"And also say 'happy New Year' and 'wishing you prosperity' and…." Ji Ning got stuck. Thinking hard, he managed after a few moments, "Give me red packets, please!"

Ji Mingxuan cleared his throat, reminding Ji Ning, "Not the last one."

"Okay." Ji Ning pouted, looking somewhat disappointed. "Fine, then."

The father-son duo was finally able to amuse Shen Mo. He didn't know whether the "secret weapon" would work, but he himself felt much more relaxed.

The half hour passed quickly, and the train arrived soon. Ji Ning's excitement surged again. Putting on his backpack, he skipped out of the station.

It was New Year's Eve already, so not many pedestrians were walking in the street. It took the three of them quite some time to get a taxi. They then headed toward Shen Mo's parents' house.

Shen Mo's parents lived in an old-style compound. The exterior walls of its residential buildings already looked mottled. Shen Mo stepped into the corridor and climbed the narrow stairs. At last, he paused in front of a door on the third floor.

Looking at the place where he had grown up, Shen Mo couldn't take another step.

Ji Mingxuan walked to Shen Mo's side and asked "Why aren't you knocking?"

"What if… they refuse to open the door?"

"You won't know until you've knocked."

"That's right, Uncle." Ji Ning also came up. Holding Ji Mingxuan's hand in one hand, he grabbed Shen Mo's with his other. "Hurry up and knock."

Gazing at the two of them, Shen Mo finally smiled. He lifted his hand and knocked.

On New Year's Eve, Shen Mo and his mother were making dumplings in the kitchen.

"... This friend of yours, he's really considerate. For three whole months, he called Lao-Shen every night. Your dad's such a stubborn person, and even *he* gave in and agreed to see him once."

"And then what happened? How did he persuade my dad?"

"Your dad doesn't have many hobbies. All he likes is to drink tea." Mrs. Shen pressed her lips together and smiled. "Your friend brought him some good tea."

Shen Mo couldn't help smiling either.

He knew it—when would Mr. Ji ever do something he wasn't confident in? It

turned out that Ji Mingxuan had already bribed his parents. Shen Mo had been so anxious for their entire journey, afraid he might be kicked out, but when the door was opened, he found that his parents had already finished preparing the reunion dinner and were waiting for him.

Remembering how touched he had felt at that moment, Shen Mo felt a little teary-eyed even now.

Ji Mingxuan was with Mr. Shen in the living room, studying the tea set Ji Mingxuan had brought them. Ji Ning was watching TV, at times running over and popping into the kitchen to ask, “Are the dumplings ready yet?”

He seemed desperately eager.

Mrs. Shen grinned widely and answered, “Almost, almost. Just go outside and wait a little longer, Xiao-Ning.”

“Okay. Thank you, Grandma.”

Ji Ning was quite a sweet kid. The second he had come in, he’d called the elders “Grandpa” and “Grandma,” easily winning over their hearts. Eating dumplings wasn’t actually a New Year’s tradition here in the South, but because Ji Ning had wanted to eat dumplings, Mrs. Shen immediately pulled Shen Mo into the kitchen and had him make dumplings with her. Even Shen Mo, her actual son, felt a little jealous.

Once they finished making the dumplings, everyone gathered in the living room to watch the Spring Festival Gala, while Shen Mo went to tidy up his bedroom. Shen Mo’s house had only two bedrooms and one living room, so it was a bit cramped with the three additional people, especially when it came to sleeping. After much discussion, they could only let Ji Ning sleep in the bigger room with Mr. and Mrs. Shen. On the other hand, Ji Mingxuan would sleep with Shen Mo in the smaller room.

As Shen Mo was making his bed, Ji Mingxuan knocked on the door. He walked in and asked, “You’re not finished yet?”

“No, the room is too small. It’s a little messy.”

“I’m fine as long as there’s a place to sleep at night. Don’t stress about it.”

Shen Mo still felt embarrassed. “Maybe… you should take Ji Ning and go spend the night in a hotel.”

“Ji Ning likes it here quite a lot.” Ji Mingxuan looked at Shen Mo. “I do too.”

“Mr. Ji…”

“Besides, I’ve always wanted to see the place where you grew up."

There were no chairs in the room, so Ji Mingxuan sat down on the edge of the bed, tilting his head as he watched Shen Mo make the bed.

Slowly folding the blanket, Shen Mo whispered, “Mr. Ji, thank you.”

“For what?”

“You must’ve spent quite a lot of effort on my parents.”

Ji Mingxuan only smiled. “Just a few phone calls.”

He patted Shen Mo on the shoulder. “All right. Let’s go watch some TV.”

Shen Mo and Ji Mingxuan went back to the living room together. The whole family was huddled on the sofa, watching the Spring Festival Gala. Only when Ji Ning began to yawn did they retreat to their bedrooms to sleep.

Shen Mo’s bed was really a bit too small. With two full-grown men lying on top of it, it creaked with the slightest movement.

Of course, Shen Mo couldn’t fall asleep. Staring at the ceiling, he said, “I wonder

if Ji Ning is sleeping well."

A while later, he said again, "Should I sleep on the floor instead?"

Hearing this, Ji Mingxuan couldn't help but laugh. "That's enough. Don't bother."

When he finished, he sat up from the bed.

This startled Shen Mo. "You're not sleeping anymore?"

"It's almost midnight. We should go set off some firecrackers."

"Oh… right."

Fireworks and firecrackers had long since been banned in large cities—Shen Mo had almost forgotten about such a custom. Since Ji Mingxuan was heading out, Shen Mo got up too and put on some layers. The two didn't wake up Mr. and Mrs. Shen, who were sleeping next door, and felt their way downstairs in the dark.

Outside, many people were already setting off firecrackers. Bursts and crackles sounded one after another. These days, the weather was still cold. Shen Mo stomped his feet, suddenly remembering something. "We didn't buy firecrackers, did we?"

"Don't worry. I have it all ready."

With astonishing familiarity, Ji Mingxuan brought a box of fireworks out of Shen Mo's family's garage.

Shen Mo originally wanted to ask Ji Mingxuan when the latter had prepared all this, but he thought about it some more. Ji Mingxuan had already dealt with his dad behind his back, so what was there that Ji Mingxuan couldn't do? A box of fireworks was a piece of cake to Ji Mingxuan.

Ji Mingxuan glanced at his watch: only two minutes until midnight. He asked Shen Mo, "Do you remember that year, on New Year's Eve, when I called you while I was abroad? You said you were spending New Year's at your parents' house, but I knew you were lying the moment I heard you."

"Of course I remember." Shen Mo could also recall that later on, Ji Mingxuan had even flown back looking for him.

"At the time, I thought"—the street lamps lit up Ji Mingxuan's face, revealing the tinge of tenderness hidden deep within his eyes—"that one day, I was going to go back to your hometown with you on New Year's Eve, and set off fireworks with you."

Shen Mo felt his heart skip a beat.

Right then, the clock struck midnight. Ji Mingxuan tossed a lighter toward Shen Mo. "Let's light it up together."

Once the fuse was ignited, the blazing fire soon sprang up, bursting into brilliant colors in the night sky.

But the beautiful scene wasn't what Ji Mingxuan looked at. He turned around, toward Shen Mo, and like many years ago, uttered in a low voice, "Shen Mo, happy New Year."

# Extra Story 11: Sunny Days

It was New Year's Day.

For once, Shen Mo woke up naturally.

The days before the Lunar New Year had been filled with rain, yet surprisingly, the sun showed its face right on the first day of the new year. At about nine in the morning, Shen Mo woke up from his sleep. Still dazed, he looked at the time. The first thing that came to his mind was to prepare breakfast for Ji Ning. But he immediately remembered that he was spending New Year's at his parents' house. With his parents here to take care of Ji Ning, Ji Ning definitely wouldn't starve.

The blanket was enveloped in the smell of sunlight.

Shen Mo rolled around under the blanket, and then lay in bed for a while longer before he got up to dress himself. Once he was done, he walked out of his room, although only to find that Ji Mingxuan was alone in the living room.

"Mr. Ji, where are my parents?"

Ji Mingxuan was reading the news, holding a cup of tea in his hand. Even as he sat in the small living room of Shen Mo's house, his elegance still didn't diminish at all. Lifting his chin, he said, "They took Ji Ning out to play."

"Huh? Where did they go?"

"Some amusement park, from what I heard."

"They went out that early? Then what are we going to do?"

"That's right." Ji Mingxuan put down his newspaper and revealed a faint smile. "So it seems we've been set aside."

Shen Mo didn't know what he meant.

Ji Mingxuan sighed. He could only ask, "Tell me. Where do you want to go?"

Shen Mo finally understood, although somewhat belatedly. Ji Mingxuan was always busy with work, and Shen Mo's work wasn't easy either. They rarely had any time for leisure, so they should really use this as a chance to relax properly.

Shen Mo thought for a while and said, "It's quite a small place. There probably aren't many things to do."

Ji Mingxuan seemed as if he'd known Shen Mo would say this. He suggested, "Let's go watch a movie, then."

"Sure. What should we watch?"

Ji Mingxuan handed Shen Mo a movie theater's brochure. "You can choose."

Shen Mo accepted it and took a look. A whole row of New Year's movies was printed on the brochure.

Why did he feel… that Mr. Ji had been planning this for a long time?

But Shen Mo didn't ask. He looked through the brochure carefully. Most New Year's movies were for families to watch together—they weren't too different from one another. In the end, Shen Mo chose a comedy film. "Let's watch this one."

Right after, Shen Mo remembered something and asked, "It's not that easy to buy tickets now, is it?"

"That's not a problem."

Ji Mingxuan glanced at the name of the film that Shen Mo had chosen. He then called his assistant. "Yes, it's me. Bring me the tickets."

In less than ten minutes, a young man wearing glasses came upstairs and gave Shen Mo two movie tickets.

Shen Mo looked at the seat numbers. The seats were quite good, but—

# Extra Story 12: Villa

Kids always grew up the fastest. When Ji Ning had first returned to China, he hadn't even begun kindergarten yet, but in the blink of an eye, he was already about to start elementary school. Living in the house in Jinxiu Villa was comfortable indeed, but considering the school district and transportation to and from school, Ji Mingxuan still decided to move back to the Ji family's house.

The house was where Ji Mingxuan and his sister Ji An'an had grown up. It had once been a place of sorrow for him. Yet, as time passed, especially as he watched Ji Ning mature day by day, the wound in his heart gradually healed.

Since Ji Mingxuan had decided to move back, of course Shen Mo had no objections either. The house had been renovated just two years ago, but as it'd been left empty for a long time, there was still a sense of loneliness. Shen Mo planned to take some time to clean up the house before they moved in.

At first, Ji Mingxuan didn't agree to this. "Can't you leave those things to the house cleaner?"

"But Xiao-Ning will be living here. I don't feel comfortable leaving the cleaning to someone else."

After living together for several years, Shen Mo thought of Ji Ning as his own child. He was more committed than even Ji Mingxuan, Ji Ning's father. Unable to persuade Shen Mo, Ji Mingxuan could only nod and give in.

Shen Mo's work schedule was quite flexible. He went out his way to take an entire day off to do the cleaning. After the renovation, people were hired to clean the house regularly, so there weren't many places that needed to be cleaned. Shen Mo busied himself for the morning, mopping the floor and wiping the windows until the house looked spotless. He was going to tidy up the rooms that they'd be sleeping in in the afternoon. He made do with some bread at lunch and then sat down on the sofa to rest for a while.

The pleasant springtime sunlight shone warmly through the window. As he sat on the sofa, without realizing it, he gradually fell asleep.

When Shen Mo woke up again, he discovered that dark clouds had gathered outside the window, almost as if there would be a heavy storm soon.

*Strange—the weather report didn't say it'd rain today, though?*

Shen Mo yawned and got up to close the window. Looking around, he felt that the living room's furnishing looked vaguely different.

When he'd been cleaning in the morning, the room didn't look like this… did it?

But it was impossible that the house had changed in the span of just a short nap, right?

Shen Mo suspected that he was still half asleep. He rubbed his eyes and was just about to continue his work when he heard a sound come from upstairs.

Apart from him, somebody else was also inside the house?

A thief had broken in?

Suddenly growing nervous, Shen Mo looked in the direction that the sound had come from. He only saw a boy slowly descending the stairs.

The boy had delicate features. He wore a white button-up, and his hair was slightly messy from just having woken up. Although his age was different, Shen Mo still recognized who he was by just a single glance.

*M-Mr. Ji…?*

# Extra Story 13: Wishes

Ji Ning had only two birthday wishes.

The first was to own an adorable kitten. The second was for his dad to spend more time with him.

After he finished his cake, he fell deep asleep, hugging his little dinosaur. The next day, just after the sky brightened, he heard a loud noise from next door. It sounded as if something had fallen on the ground.

Ji Ning woke up, still drowsy, and called, "... Daddy?"

No one replied.

Even Uncle Shen, who had always spoiled him the most, was nowhere to be seen.

Ji Ning rubbed his eyes. He put on his small coat and ran out of the room, his slippers pattering. The next room was unlocked, so he pushed the door open and poked his head in to take a look. It was dim inside. The blanket on the bed was bunched up in a ball. Uncle Shen was the only one sitting on the messy bed.

Uncle Shen waved at him, so he ran over and asked, "Where's Daddy?"

Somewhat guilty, Shen Mo glanced at the bunched-up blanket. "He… went to work."

"He has to go to work even on the weekend?"

"Yeah. There was something urgent."

Ji Ning revealed a disappointed expression. "But Daddy promised to play with me today."

"I'm sorry. It's really a special situation this time. How about I play with you?" Shen Mo stroked Ji Ning's hair and said, "It's still early. Go back and get some more sleep, Xiao-Ning."

Ji Ning had always been an obedient kid. He didn't throw a tantrum, only walking away dejectedly.

Shen Mo finally sighed in relief.

The bunched-up blanket on the bed wriggled slowly. Then, out came an odd-eyed white cat. Its fur was snowy and soft, while its fluffy tail swished left and right. Its different-colored eyes looked especially beautiful.

Shen Mo was so mesmerized by the big white cat's beauty that he didn't return to his senses until a while later. Staring eye-to-eye with the cat, he asked, "Mr. Ji, what should we do? Do you want to go to the hospital? Hm, or maybe an animal hospital?"

The big white cat ignored Shen Mo. He only raised his chin and gracefully leaped down the bed.

Shen Mo grabbed his phone and ran after the cat. Having experienced such a shock on the first day of the new year, he really wanted to post a Moment on WeChat, asking, *What should I do if I woke up and found out that a family member turned into a cat? Urgent! Waiting for answers!*

After all the trouble of stopping his hand from posting the Moment, Shen Mo followed the big white cat into the study. He saw the cat dexterously jump onto the desk, reach out its paw, and pat the computer on the desk.

Three seconds later, Shen Mo came to understand what he meant and immediately turned on the computer. He then watched as the big white cat, sitting on the keyboard, started to wave its squishy paws and type. It was quite a bizarre

scene.

Shen Mo didn't say anything to disturb the cat. In silence, he decided that his second Moment would be: *What should I do if a family member's still a workaholic even after he turned into a cat? Still waiting for an answer!*

Right then, scurrying footsteps sounded outside the door. Ji Ning, who had already dressed himself, barged in and called, "Uncle, play with me…"

His voice paused before it instantly heightened, turning into an ecstatic cheer. "Kitty!"

Shouting, he rushed over and hugged the big white cat, who was still busy with work.

Shen Mo's eyelid twitched. He was sure that Mr. Ji… no, the big white cat's face had darkened.

Ji Ning, of course, was completely oblivious. He asked, "Did Daddy buy them for me?"

"Um, you can say that."

Ji Ning fell in love with the big white cat at first sight. Now that he had seized the cat, he refused to let go no matter what. "Uncle, what should we name the kitty?"

"Oh? What do you think?"

"What about Xiao-Bai*?"

*Translator's Note: Xiao-Bai, literally "little white," is a common name for pets.

"Uh... " Shen Mo sneaked a glance at the cat's expression. "I don't think he'd like it…"

But Ji Ning was already running to his bedroom, holding the big white cat in his arms. He said as he ran, "Xiao-Bai, let's play fetch."

Ji Ning had a pretty little ball that he really liked, given to him by Ji Mingxuan. Now, he took it out as if he was presenting a treasure and tossed it toward a corner, yelling, "Xiao-Bai, fetch!"

The big white cat crouched elegantly on the ground, wagging his tail lazily.

"Oh." Ji Ning scratched his head. "I'll fetch, then."

As he said this, Ji Ning scampered over to pick up the ball.

Shen Mo found this quite funny, so he let them play. It wasn't until lunchtime that he called Ji Ning out of his room.

Hugging the big white cat, Ji Ning asked, "Uncle, what is Xiao-Bai gonna eat for lunch?"

"Hmm…"

This was also what Shen Mo was thinking about. In the end, he made some noodles and put them into a small bowl for the cat to eat.

The big white cat had on an expression of distaste as if he'd kick over the small bowl in front of him anytime. Eventually, however, he ate a few mouthfuls out of respect.

After lunch, the big white cat slipped into the study again. But just as he jumped onto the computer desk, Ji Ning came in with a picture book in his arms.

"Uncle gave this to me yesterday for my birthday. I wanted to read it together with Daddy today, but…" Ji Ning waved at the big white cat and asked, "Xiao-Bai, can you read it with me?"

"Meow—"

The big white cat glanced at the computer on the table, and then at Ji Ning, who

looked ever so pitiful. Finally, he jumped off the computer table and nimbly walked toward Ji Ning.

At once, Ji Ning was beaming. He sat down by the windowsill and opened the picture book that Shen Mo had given him. With an effortless leap, the big white cat got onto Ji Ning's lap and lay down.

Ji Ning didn't mind the cat's weight either. Holding him, he continued to turn the pages.

"Once upon a time, there was a shepherd boy…"

"Meow."

"Oh no, I forgot how to pronounce this word."

"Meow!"

"Okay. I'll write it down first and ask Daddy when he comes back."

"Meow meow."

The two of them didn't speak the same language, but they still seemed to be communicating well.

Shen Mo saw this from outside the door. He didn't go in and disturb them, and only closed the door gently.

The big white cat read the picture book with Ji Ning for the whole afternoon. They played hide-and-seek in the evening too. Only when Ji Ning started to yawn sleepily did Ji Ning reluctantly go to bed.

Shen Mo and the big white cat both stayed beside the bed, putting Ji Ning to sleep. Once Ji Ning was asleep, Shen Mo whispered, "You didn't work at all today, Mr. Ji. Is that okay?"

The big white cat didn't reply. He only bit a corner of the blanket and tried his best to pull it up, tucking Ji Ning in.

Shen Mo couldn't help but smile. He said, "I wonder if you can turn back tomorrow, Mr. Ji. What if you never turn back?"

"Meow—"

The big white cat gave Shen Mo a stern glare.

Shen Mo immediately said, "I'm sorry. You'll definitely turn back!"

*Hmph.*

The white cat flicked his tail and raised his head proudly. Then, he curled up into a ball and lay down beside Ji Ning.

He was probably going to sleep with Ji Ning, then.

The corners of Shen Mo's lips lifted. He stroked the cat's soft fur and turned off the wall light.

*Good night, Mr. Cat.*

# Extra Story 14: Make Up

*Click.*

Yang Yue sent Shen Mo the photo she had just taken, adding the caption: *Ran into the "missus" while I was shopping. Looks like he's out shopping with quite a beautiful woman.*

In the photo was a luxury car; a slender woman was getting out of it. Only her back could be seen, but one could tell from just her stylish outfit that she must be beautiful.

Around five minutes later, Shen Mo finally replied: *I've told you so many times. There's no "missus."*

Yang Yue took a sip of the milk tea in her hand. She couldn't help but feel amused.

Shen Mo was the owner of the studio where Yang Yue worked. He was good-tempered and good-looking, but his only shortcoming had been being single in his thirties. Even Yang Yue, his employee, had started worrying for him. Over last Lunar New Year, Shen Mo spent his vacation travelling abroad, and when he came back, he said he wanted to work hard at his job so that he could provide for a child. It gave Yang Yue quite a shock.

Later, Yang Yue went out of her way to coax Shen Mo for the details. She managed to find out that Shen Mo had met a beautiful lady overseas, one who was divorced, single, and raising a child. Shen Mo fell in love with her at first sight and immediately started planning to make money and support the family as a stepdad.

A romantic plot that could only be seen in a movie!

Yang Yue, who loved watching romance shows, instantly dreamed up a cliché drama. She couldn't wait to see the future "missus." However, when she eventually saw the real person, her jaw dropped in astonishment.

Yep, beautiful indeed, but a beautiful man instead of a woman. If Yang Yue didn't already have a boyfriend, she'd rush over toward him at once.

After Shen Mo's introduction, Yang Yue learned that Mr. Ji was taking care of a three-year-old alone. The child's mother had long since passed away. Shen Mo knew the mother too, and because of various complicated reasons, he had decided to raise the child together with Mr. Ji.

It wasn't as cliché as what Yang Yue had imagined, but having a handsome man to look at wasn't so bad either. From then on, Yang Yue called the man "Mr. Ji" as Shen Mo did. Only when she teased Shen Mo did she sometimes mention the word "missus."

This time was the same. Yang Yue came across Mr. Ji while she was shopping, so she joked about it with Shen Mo. She didn't take it seriously and had a great time over the weekend, but she discovered that Shen Mo was already in the studio when she went to work on Monday.

"Boss? Why did you get here so early today? I thought you lived in Jinxiu Villa. The traffic should've been quite bad on your way over."

"Yeah." Shen Mo's complexion didn't look too good. It seemed as if he didn't sleep well. "I didn't go home last night."

"What? Why?"

Shen Mo replied vaguely, "There's a lot of work. I was worried I couldn't finish in time."

# Afterword

*The fourth of February is the start of spring.*

*With the return of spring, everything refreshes again.*

*I always like spring. It's a gentle season. Tender winds in spring are intoxicating. So I set Mr. Ji's birthday on the start of spring.*

*When I began to write this story, the character of Mr. Ji was actually quite vague to me. Such a beginning just suddenly came to my mind, so I wrote it down casually. I did not know what would happen in Chapter Two even when I had finished Chapter One. So at the very beginning, Mr. Ji was only a handsome figure. He's proud and indifferent; he had great control over the things around him. Shen Mo often felt him temperamental and unpredictable when getting along with him. In the chapter when Zhao Yi appeared on the scene, Mr. Ji put on the cuff-links Shen Mo chose and introduced Shen Mo as "the future Mrs. Ji". It was then that I suddenly realized that Mr. Ji loved Shen Mo all along!*

*The following plots also flowed reasonably, Mr. Ji began to reveal his heart. Dull as Shen Mo was, he inevitably indulged in such tenderness. But when Shen Mo walked into the Jinxiu Villa and saw the room filled with paintings for the first time, I hit the wall. It was too difficult to handle the flashbacks, I stopped serializing for more than half a year and once wanted to leave it unfinished. However, I finally decided to give the two an end.*

*When I began to write about the memories, it was not as difficult as I thought it would be. Things happened naturally when Shen Mo got along with Mr. Ji. Although Shen Mo lost his memories, his heart was always determined—who he loved was the one that saved him in danger. Later the two met again in the island; it was then that he finally plucked up the courage and drew his own heart on Mr. Ji's palm.*

*There were actually many regrets in the ending part. I thought I ended it too fast and was not able to write down much content. But this is only the end of the book; the story between Mr. Ji and Shen Mo is still happening.*

*I like many plots of the book, but what I like the most is always this one:*

*Mr. Ji introduced Shen Mo casually and naturally, "He's the future Mrs. Ji."*

*—He had long known that the person was the one.*

*Here's the end the postscript. I added some Extra Fragments at the end. Enjoy reading^_^*

# Work Diary

By Yang Yue

January 28th , Sunny

So surprised that boss suddenly came back when I was slacking off.

Fortunately, boss's just going abroad for a trip as usual. He goes to the same place every year. It's so boring....

After all, he's an old man at his thirties. Perhaps I should set him up with someone to date.

February 3rd , Sunny

Slacking off.

February 4th , Sunny

Slacking off.

February 8th , Cloudy

Boss called back, saying that his travel plan changed and would stay overseas a week longer. Huh... That's not what boss would do. Did he meet someone overseas? He wouldn't come back with a missus, would he?

February 10th, Sunny

Slacking off.

February 11th, Rainy

Slacking off.

February 15th , Sunny

Boss's back, looking quite radiant on his face!

Ahhh, that must be a missus soon. Could I slack off casually later on?

Quite worried about my future days...

February 18th, Cloudy

I beat around the bush and knew more about the future missus—a beauty in her thirties, divorced, single, and raising a child.

Boss was so deep in love with her. She seemed to be the type of person that was not easy to handle.

February 23rd, Rainy

Slacking off.

March 6th, Sunny

Slacking off.

March 14th, Sunny

The future missus would come to inspect tomorrow. What should I do? Should I wear fancy makeup or not?

Oh, life is hard. It's too difficult for corporate slaves.

March 19th , Rainy
Ahhhhh!!!

March 20th , Rainy
I calmed down a little and finally could continue the diary.
How should I describe the future missus?
At thirties? Not wrong.
Divorced, single and raising a child? Not wrong either.
Gorgeous? Not wrong either, of course.
But when all of these go together, that wasn't what I imagined at all!
Breathe, breathe, take a deep breath. I need to calm down.

March 22nd , Sunny
Working here is quite nice.

March 24th , Sunny
Working here is really happy.

March 28th, Rainy
Missus came here with afternoon tea desserts and snacks to inspect .... no, to greet employees.
The strawberry cakes were yummy!
Missus's beauty was quite pleasing(erased) and he's such a feast to the eye(erased)...
Oh, missus told me to keep an eye on boss's emotion and contact him at any time if anything happened? Although he did not say it directly, he had made it clear. He might be worried if boss had an affair, so he asked me to be his spy?
Huh...

March 29th , Cloudy
I finally made the decision after struggling for a whole night. Boss's such a nice guy, how could I betray him?
I would, of course, — stand by missus's side and sneak on boss anytime and anywhere!
I had decided to end the *Work Diary* here and begin *Boss Observing Diary* next week. Please stay tuned!

□END□